THE CASTLE ROCK MYSTERY

BY

GEORGE GIBBS

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M A D M A R R I A G E
SACKCLOTH AND SCARLET
THE LOVE OF MONSIEUR
HOW TO STAY MARRIED
THE HOUSE OF MOHUN
YOUTH TRIUMPHANT
FIRES OF AMBITION
THE VAGRANT DUKE
THE GOLDEN BOUGH
THE YELLOW DOVE
THE UP-GRADE
M A D C A P
T O N Y ' S W I F E
THE BLACK STONE
THE BOLTED DOOR
PARADISE GARDEN
THE SILENT BATTLE
THE FLAMING SWORD
THE FORBIDDEN WAY
THE SECRET WITNESS
THE MEDUSA EMERALD
THE FLAME OF COURAGE
THE SPLENDID OUTCAST
THE LOVE OF MADEMOISELLE
THE MAKER OF OPPORTUNITIES

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GEORGE GIBBS

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Stranger in the Patent Leather Boots	1
II.	Mr. Krouse Takes a Hand	12
III.	The Devil Decamps	28
IV.	Judith	40
V.	Out of the Past	59
VI.	Circumstantial Evidence	74
VII.	Sniping	87
VIII.	The Inquest	104
IX.	The Inquest Continued	118
X.	The Tale of a Shirt	132
XI.	Surprises	149
XII.	The Revolver	167
XIII.	The Hotel Maupin	181
XIV.	The Cat Comes Out of the Bag	194
XV.	Two Messages	209
XVI.	Miss Newbury's Apartment	222
XVII.	Revelation	235
XVIII.	The Ends of Justice	252
XIX.	The End	272

The CASTLE ROCK MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

THE STRANGER IN THE PATENT LEATHER BOOTS

I

BROCK aroused himself, like one awaking from the dead. He stared at the ceiling, slowly struggling to consciousness, grinned at the patch of light on his work table near the window, aware that he had slept as he had not slept for weeks. He swung on an elbow and then upright staring bewildered at his trousered legs and muddy boots. He remembered now. He had taken a long walk just before dusk to try to vanquish a Nemesis and find the solution of a problem —the situation in his new mystery story that had baffled him for days. He tried to recall if anything constructive had come out of his physical exercise but his mind seemed to be as blank this morning as when the nerve crash had come six weeks ago.

He was a haunted man, haunted by the careless phrase of a candid friend—"Early success is the springboard into oblivion." The phrase had sung in his ears, he heard it whispered to him in his dreams, it pursued him, waking, like the ghost of a sin and wrote itself in fiery letters across the blameless white of his manuscript paper.

As the blood surged into his head again he was aware of the old obsession that the new book would not fulfill the promise of a *A Leap in the Dark.* He had been a fool to go on with the new book against the orders of Dr. Ordway, the nerve specialist who had sent him up here to his Aunt Julia's little cottage in the Alleghenies where simple food, clean air, and release from the mad rush of the city would bring the quiet that his frazzled nerves demanded. God knows he had wanted to rest. But his brain had refused to obey the needs of his weary body. It whirled on, in command of him, leaping wildly from one thought to another, driven by the urge of creation which he had set in motion and could not stop. Only violent physical exercise brought him brief moments of relaxation and the blesscd sleep that saved him from another collapse.

It was with the object of becoming completely exhausted that he had gone late yesterday afternoon to roam the hills with a shotgun and a pocket full of shells in search of game, and had only succeeded in thinking more desperately of his work. A new scheme for the book that seemed to have possibilities. What was that scheme? Curious that he couldn't recall it now. Something to do with a drug and its effect. . . . No. The thought would not return. . . . He got up, wandered over to the table wondering if he had made a note of it, but there was nothing on the manuscript, just the hated phrase, written two days ago, which had brought him to the brink of his dilemma.

He had thought of destroying the book yesterday, but now he turned away frowning, and slowly took off his clothing, preparing for a bath. He must have been completely exhausted to tumble on the bed with all his

clothes on. There was the shotgun in the corner by the fireplace and the old yellow shooting jacket hanging from a hook in the closet. He had been so weary that he could not remember what had happened when he came in, except seeing the bed. . . . Aunt Julia had probably come in silently during the night and turned out the light, leaving him sleeping fully clothed rather than taking the risk of waking him.

But he had slept! He had slept many hours. And though his brain now quickly resumed its leaping from thought to thought he fancied that it did not leap so nimbly. His nerves, too, seemed more quiet. He shaved, bathed, and dressed, not in his rough clothing, but in a linen shirt and flannel trousers, as though hoping, thus, to complete his physical regeneration.

"It was mighty good you managed to get to sleep at last, Joe," said Aunt Julia at the breakfast table as she brought him his eggs and coffee.

" 'Knit the raveled sleeve of care.' Well, I'll say so. Poor Aunt Julia! I made a mess of your clean counterpane. That's what you get for playing the good Samaritan to a nut."

"Well," said Aunt Julia, her wide, placid smile reproaching him, "So long as you *did* sleep at last, Joe." She brushed an imaginary crumb from the table. "Things were getting to a pretty pass," she went on scornfully. "You know, I don't take much stock in these new-fangled doctors. If you hadn't got your sleep last night I'd made up my mind to put some drops of laudanum into your coffee."

"Laudanum!"

Brock leaped from his chair, almost upsetting his coffee cup.

"Laudanum! That was it!" He put his hand to his eyes, and then turned toward her, frowning and shaking his head.

"No. It wasn't laudanum. But it was something about a drug—in coffee—the day before the killing. . . ."

"There you go again—that story—"

"I've *got* to get it," he muttered.

She laid an arm soothingly around his shoulders.

"There, there, Joe," she said. "Now you just sit and finish your breakfast." She pushed him gently back into his chair and filled his coffee cup. "I'm going to burn that manuscript if you don't stop working on it."

"I wish to God you would," he muttered with feeling.

He ate moodily, but still thinking. A drug that had the effect he wanted. He must find that out. Old man Trudeau's library would help him there. A drug that soothed, obliterated the sense of moral responsibility. Heroin, perhaps. No, that wouldn't do. Nothing so stimulating. There must be something else—something oriental. Those fellows knew. He'd go and talk to Emile Trudeau.

2

Trudeau's place, "Castle Rock" they called it, adjoined Aunt Julia's, but the houses were a quarter of a mile apart. Brock went out on the porch, lighting his pipe. It was a dour day. A rain had fallen during the night and the atmosphere was still soaked almost to the point of precipitation. White clouds of palpable weight hung on the ledges of Laurel Mountain obscuring its summit. Near by trees dripped sadly. The

world was weeping with him. He went down the walk and out into the high road.

He wondered if he would find old Trudeau in a good humor. Queer old bird, moody, suspicious, and irascible; kindly at one moment and on the verge of violence at the next. Brock had managed in some way to win past the barriers of the old man's reserve, a feat most astonishing to Julia Magruder who had lived next door to the Frenchman for five years and never had a word out of him. Aunt Julia did not like the old man. He talked with a funny accent. There was something strange about him. Other old residents of Laurel and Northampton thought so, too. Trudeau had been even more exclusive since his wife had died, but there was a girl, Mrs. Trudeau's niece, now away somewhere at college, of whom Aunt Julia spoke with pleasant friendliness.

Some sort of natural affinity had brought Brock and Trudeau together. And Brock's talks with the old Frenchman in the little library upstairs were the result of a revolt of two keen intelligences against the hopeless commonplace of their other neighbors. Under the soft effulgence of the evening lamp he and Joe Brock discussed the joyous ironies of Anatole France or the impudences of Henri Bernstein. There Brock forgot the strange tales that were going around and saw before him only a very tired old man with a round bald head and skin like wrinkled parchment, who wore clothes much too large for him.

It was, therefore, with the privileges of this brief but intimate acquaintance that Brock went up the drive of the old house in the hope of finding some solution of the puzzling problem that confronted him. Castle

Rock looked more forbidding than ever under the leaden sky, a two-story stone house with a mansard roof, a cupola of wood over the main building, the kitchen and sheds trailing aimlessly in the direction of the chicken yard; a drab spot in a drab landscape, solitary, unfriendly and unfriended, still possessing vestiges of the grandeur of a forgotten era, but now an architectural derelict awaiting only complete decay or the torch to reduce it to the elements from which it had come. To Brock, the trained observer, the place partook of the characteristics of its strange occupant—his air of aloofness, his mock dignity in the clothing that was much too large for him. The little cupola, too, was not unlike the absurd little hat that Emile Trudeau wore on his round bald head. One shutter upstairs hung askew like the bandanna handkerchief that always depended from the old man's coat pocket. But as usual the shutters on the lower floor, except those of the dining room and kitchen, were closed and bolted.

The tops of the evergreen trees nodded in the gathering breeze, giving the visitor a dismal greeting. Why was it that Brock felt a sense of oppression, almost of repulsion as he drew near the porch? Nerves. With an effort he shook off the moment of discomfort and mounted the steps. There was no sound, except the tinkling of the bell in some deep recess of the house, nor, as he waited, any sound of the footsteps of the old man's only factotum and servant. Brock's need seemed to grow more urgent with this denial, so he went impatiently around the house to the kitchen door. It was open. He knocked but there was no reply. He waited a moment and then wandered out to the woodshed and chicken houses. There was no one about.

Returning to the kitchen door he knocked and called again more loudly this time. He thought the silence strange, for the Frenchman never went off the place. He was an early riser, whose habits went by the clock, and the negro servant's were as regular. The visitor, still listening, was on the point of turning away in disappointment when something in the quality of the silence in reply to his commotion made him push the kitchen door wider open. The place was sullen, resentful of intrusion. Strange impression. Nerves again, of course. He went into the kitchen, still listening intently and staring around. The kettle was singing on the range, there was an odor of food recently cooked, the evidences of its preparation. Brock smiled more confidently as he walked toward the dining-room door. He again called aloud the old man's name and then paused, shocked by the flatness of his own voice in its impact on the silence. It was a tangible thing, this silence, like a curtain stretched before him, or like utter darkness.

But, impressionable as he knew he was, curiosity dominated and he opened the dining-room door. The table was set for one. On a dish were two fried eggs and several pieces of bacon, and beside the dish was a cup of coffee, still warm, all giving forth the pleasant odors that he had noticed. Perhaps old Trudeau had been called and then gone to sleep again. But then, where was Johnson, the colored man?

It was not until this moment that Brock began to suspect that things were not as they should be at Castle Rock. Keenly aroused and puzzled at the sudden desertion of the house, he went out into the dim hallway peering up the stairs, wondering if his acquaintance

with the old man warranted the intrusion of his bedroom at this hour of the morning. At the head of the stairs there was a window which threw a cool light over the tips of the treads. Halfway up there was something on the stair, something dark reddish in color. He went up, the stairs creaking and complaining. The object that he had seen from below was a red bandanna handkerchief. Trudeau's. He picked it up and examined it curiously. There was a dark stain on it. The red bandanna handkerchief seemed to indicate to Brock a definite duty, and after a moment of hesitation he went up, hurrying along the upper passage toward the library. The door was closed. Here again, silence, inhibition. He knocked and called again, aware of a growing excitement in the venture; then opened the door and entered.

The room was bathed in a dirty amber shadow from the brown shade at the window, but a pallid light trickled along the sill until it was absorbed into the shadows, suggesting rather than revealing an unusual condition within the room. Brock moved quickly to the window and carried by the momentum of his impulse, drew up the shade, flooding the room with the pallid reflections of the somber day. His glance shot eagerly here and there. Papers were scattered on the floor, a chair was overturned, a corner of the Turkey rug was twisted—signs of disorder and of violence. And protruding from the murkiness behind the bookshelves to his left, a shadow that he had instinctively avoided now took form and substance, the feet and legs of a man sprawled in one of the ingenuous dislocations of death.

Brock's first impulse was to rush from the room and

downstairs to give the alarm, but when he reached the door he remembered the silence that had answered his summons. And a morbid interest held him. He turned back into the room. Trudeau. . . . He stared fascinated and came nearer, bending over the body. The boots were of patent leather, mud stained, but the gray tweed of the trousers, neatly creased, did not suggest the untidiness of the Frenchman.

Brock turned on the light of the lamp which illuminated the shadow where the man had fallen. A black stain upon one side of his face had spread to the flooring and disappeared under an edge of the rug. But the dead man was not Trudeau. He had a full shock of grizzled brown hair, the face was clean shaven, the eye sockets deep, the nose small and sharply pointed. The mouth had sagged open unpleasantly and death had accentuated a kind of mild viciousness in the whole physiognomy. Brock touched the dead man's fingers and then straightened, bewildered; for the body was already cold, indicating that the stranger had been dead for many hours. Who had killed him? And where was old man Trudeau? A glance into the adjoining bedroom showed it in disorder but deserted. Where was Johnson? And what of the food that awaited Trudeau on his breakfast table? The mystery deepened, but he was reminded suddenly of his anomalous position, that he was not Joe Brock, the special reporter on a metropolitan newspaper, but merely a visitor in this country community who had stumbled by accident upon a dead body, and at the present moment an actual intruder between a crime and the local police who should at once be notified. He had been so intent upon his examination of the room that

he did not hear the light patter of running feet upon the stairway. And before he could reach the door into the passage a girl stood in the opening.

"It's Judy, Uncle Emile," she said breathlessly. "I'm here. I. . . ."

The blue eyes of the intruder had been bright with anticipation, her cheeks warmly flushed from the open air and the excitement of her arrival. But at the sight of the sober face of the man before her she stood still, poised uncertainly, a hesitant hand grasping for the support of the door jamb.

"My uncle . . . ," she gasped haltingly, still staring at Brock. From where she stood, she could not see what lay in the shadow of the bookcases beyond the table, but he saw her eyes, slowly distending, make a quick appraisal of the disorderly room, as a glimmering of the truth that she read in Brock's eyes sent the color out of her cheeks and back to her heart.

"I'm a neighbor. I just got here. Something dreadful has happened," he said firmly. "You must not—"

"Uncle Emile! He's hurt, injured—"

"No," said Brock quickly. "Mr. Trudeau isn't here."

"Then what—" she gasped in relief. She had taken a pace into the room and as she glanced past him he saw her eyes suddenly distended with horror. She closed them for a moment and then thrust forward.

But he caught her by the elbow, interposing.

"It's not Mr. Trudeau. Some one else—a stranger."

She stopped, her glance fluttering like a frightened bird from one object to another.

"You mustn't see," said Brock again. "You must go downstairs. I was about to notify the police. . . ."

She yielded to his insistence and he closed the door behind them, while she put her head into her hands in a desperate moment of self-communion. She seemed on the edge of tears but she conquered her emotion and straightened, for outside there was a sound of a motor engine, the voices of men, and as Brock led her to the landing the negro servant Johnson and an officer in the dark gray uniform of the state police came up the stairs.

CHAPTER II

MR. KROUSE TAKES A HAND

PRIVATE Coales was a florid young man, military in manner and fully impressed by the importance of his position. He gave Brock a quick glance.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I'm Joe Brock, from over at Mrs. Magruder's."

"What are you doing here?"

"I just came over to see Mr. Trudeau."

The policeman looked at Johnson who had been staring at Brock with such intentness that the yellowish whites of his eyes gave an impression of owlish wisdom.

"Do you know this man?" asked the policeman.

The colored man did not reply at once and Coales repeated his question which seemed to startle the servant.

"Me? Oh, yes, boss. It's Mr. Brock. He—he's a friend of Mr. Trudeau."

"H-m. I see. And this lady?"

"Miss Judith? She's Mr. Trudeau's niece."

The young policeman looked from one to the other for the confirmation which they both gave.

"Well," he said with a businesslike air, "You'll all have to stay around here until the people from Northampton get here. Where's the body?"

With another glance at Brock, Johnson led the way

and opened the door. The policeman entered while the girl remained in the passage. She had already recovered her self-possession but her pallor and the pathos of her position had aroused all that was chivalrous in Brock. She had sunk upon a chair and looked very forlorn and friendless, so preoccupied with her trouble that she gave him no further notice. The colored man, from the doorway, still rolled his eyes toward Brock whose actions seemed for some reason to have a strange fascination for him. The two had not often come into contact and Brock knew nothing of Johnson, either good or bad. But he found himself wondering at the persistence of this gaze, which had in it a dull bewilderment, a slow curiosity.

At the request of the policeman Brock entered the library.

"You've been in here?"

"Yes. I came here to borrow a book. I rang the bell and called. Then I came up here and found the body. There's no telephone here, but I was going for the police when you arrived.

"You didn't touch anything."

"I pulled up the shade, that's all. And I found this on the stairway." Brock handed the policeman the red bandanna handkerchief. Officer Coales turned the handkerchief over in his fingers, examining it carefully.

"Blood," he said. "I'll keep this for the coroner."

Then he glanced at the girl.

"Have you been in the room?"

"No, I haven't," she gasped.

"All right." Officer Coales closed the door and settled his Sam Browne belt. "We'll all have to wait here in the hall until the coroner comes. I phoned

Northampton. He ought to be here in a few moments."

Brock found himself wondering what the county officers would make of the case which, to his own mind, already skilled in this kind of investigation, seemed so clearly to involve his friend Trudeau. Flight was confession. And yet there were elements in the case in the old man's favor—the evidences of a struggle, the blow, struck with a force almost unbelievable in one of Trudeau's age. The old Frenchman was not the stuff that murderers are made of. He was irritable and nervous, but a man of peace, hating the thought of death, unwilling even to kill the chickens in his own yard. Miss Judith (for Johnson had thus spoken of her) still sat, her head bowed as though completely cowed by the situation in which she found herself. As she felt Brock's gaze upon her she turned a glance up at him and tried to smile. He thought that her face was surely not classic in its contour. It had no really beautiful features, but, like wild flowers in a bouquet, they had an assembled charm. As the color came back to her cheeks, the brightness to her eyes, he felt the appeal of her personality. He wanted to tell her that he was her friend, that, so far as it lay in his power, he would try to make her ordeal easier for her and to find evidence that would explain away the too obvious tokens of Trudeau's guilt.

To all appearances the officials who came from Northampton completed in every particular the picture Brock's mind had already made of them. Dr. Burlingame, the coroner, was heavy of body with a large round expanse of face in which, as though from motives of economy, his eyes, nose and mouth were set

very close together. He had a thin voice which seemed to ooze through the compressions of successive inward layers of fat; and his shoes squeaked when he walked. His companion was a small, silent man, quite thin, with deeply set eyes and a lantern jaw. His name was Julius Krouse and he looked like a Pennsylvania German. He represented, as Brock afterward learned, the office of the District Attorney of the county. Political creatures both, Brock thought, and scarcely equal to the task before them. The fat coroner listened to the report of the policeman, examining the bandanna handkerchief that Brock had found and then rolled into the library like a battleship, the thin man Krouse sliding unobtrusively in his wake. The space in the room was not large and Dr. Burlingame seemed to fill it completely. He bent over the body, examined the wound in the head, touched with his fat fingers objects upon the table, his features still further contracting under the mental effort of the investigation. Mr. Krouse opened the window and examined the sill. Brock had followed into the room. Old habits of thought were aroused at once, the spirit of competition, the instinct of the chase, the old flair of the newspaper man confronted with a problem to be solved. The wound, it seemed, had been made with a blunt heavy implement; the position of the body indicating complete and sudden collapse. But there was nothing in the room that might have been used for the fatal blow. The bedroom beyond was also in disorder—opened bureau drawers, a closet door ajar, various articles of apparel strewn on chairs and upon the floor. But the bed had not been slept in, for the spread was, in fact, without a wrinkle. While he watched the lumbering coroner peering here

and there, Brock tried, as he had frequently done in his newspaper work, to form a mental picture of the incidents leading to the killing and what had followed. Flight was indicated, flight hurried and terror-stricken. . . .

"We'll get the story now, Mr. Krouse," said Burlingame in his thin, puzzled voice.

"Johnson first, ain't?" snapped Mr. Krouse in a lively tone.

They were the first words the thin man had uttered but they affected Brock like the sharp bark of a terrier walking obediently to heel at the sudden scent of its quarry. Perhaps he had misjudged the capacities of Mr. Krouse by the meagerness of his physique as compared with the astounding bulk of the coroner. Brock had been aware of the little man poking around and bending over in corners, in Burlingame's shadow, unobtrusive and silent. Now he observed that the deeply set eyes were very bright in their shadows and that there was an orderly intelligence behind them.

The coroner's arm sawed complacently, directing the way to the door.

"We want your story, Johnson," he said when they reached the hallway.

"Yes, boss. I already done tole it to dis yer policeman—"

"Well, we want to hear it all over again. How long have you worked for Mr. Trudeau?"

"About fo' years, suh."

"Always got along with him all right?"

"Yassir. Oh, yassir."

"What are your duties here?"

"Duties. Well, suh, I reckon you might say I done

a little bit of ev'ythin'—cook, clean, make Mr. Trudeau's room, drive de Fohd, an' so fo'th."

"Mr. Trudeau was regular in his habits?"

"Yassir. Mos'ly. So dat's what surprise me when Mr. Trudeau never come down to his breakfus when I calls him."

"I see. You called him at the regular hour."

"Yassir. Seven-thirty he likes be called. I cooked his breakfus an' put it on de table same as usual. An' den I—"

"Wait, now, Johnson!" Mr. Julius Krouse's accents broke sharply upon this desultory inquisition. The eyes of the negro rolled around sideways at the little man, startled at the peremptory tone.

"What kind of a job did you have before you came here a'ready?"

"I was a Pullman porter," Johnson replied.

Mr. Krouse drew his brows together so that his deeply sunken eyes were not even visible. "Why did you leave that job?" he asked sharply.

"Well, you might say, I was tired of traveling."

"That wasn't, now, the only reason, was it?"

A sullen shadow flitted across Johnson's face.

"That's a good enough reason."

"Not good enough for me. Of course if we make up our minds we can find out all about it maybe. You'll save us some time if you tell the truth. You weren't fired, were you?"

The colored man frowned and then decided to smile.

"Well, sir, I don't see how it can make any diffunce. But I'll tell you de truth. I had an argument with a conductor and he framed me. I had to get out."

Krouse grinned at Johnson's discomfiture.

"That's all what I wanted to know, Doctor. Go ahead with your questions."

Brock was now quite sure that he had misjudged the little man. He spoke with the homely locutions of the neighborhood, but what there was of Mr. Krouse was intelligent from head to foot. The negro was worried and his manner betrayed an uneasiness as Burlingame spoke again.

"Tell us, Johnson, all you know that would throw light on this case. At what time did you go upstairs?"

"Just wait a minute," Krouse broke in again. "Did you notice anything funny about Trudeau this week or so past?"

The ex-porter rubbed his head reflectively. "Nossir, not special. Mr. Trudeau was a quiet sort of a man. Maybe he just stretched hisself more often than usual."

"Stretched himself! What do you mean?"

"Jes stretch his arms this-a-way."

"Oh, like he was tired."

"Yassir."

"People around here say he's queer. Did you ever find him queer?"

"He wasn't queer to me. We got along all right. Dese yer Pennsylvania Dutch people around here never had much use fo' him 'cause he never had much use fo' them. I reckon Miss Judith can tell you he wasn't queer to her."

"I'll leave Miss Kennedy say something in a little while. Did you know of anybody who had a grudge against Trudeau?"

"Nossir, nobody. But he didn't have more'n one or two close friends. Mr. Brock was acquainted with him about as well as anybody."

"And Mr. Brock came here once in a while?"

"Once or twice a week."

Krouse turned to Brock suddenly.

"You weren't here last night?" he asked him.

"No, sir. I went out hunting in the afternoon," Brock replied, "and was so tired that I turned in at supper time with all my clothes on. Mrs. Magruder, my aunt, will testify to that."

While Brock was speaking he was aware of the eyes of the colored man again queerly staring at him. If Krouse noticed, he gave no sign. But Brock was becoming impatient of this constant scrutiny. He had never thought of this colored man, Thomas Jefferson Johnson, one way or the other, but he decided now that he did not like him. His history as a Pullman porter certainly made him a subject for suspicion.

"You say you didn't notice anything funny about Trudeau," Krouse went on slowly. "Did he, now, give you any idea that he might have apprehensions?"

"The what . . .?" asked Johnson.

"Did he show some nervousness yesterday? Did he seem frightened?"

"Nossir. Not nervous. . . ."

"You're sure?"

"He never spoke much to me. Jes good mornin', Tom—like that."

"And you had no reasons to think any stranger was coming here?"

"Nossir."

"Ever see the dead man?"

"Nossir, never."

"Never been around here calling?"

"Nossir. Not as I knows."

"You're sure you never saw him a'ready?"

"Yassir. Sure."

Burlingame had lighted a cigar, accepting, with approval, Mr. Krouse's part in the investigation. The little man went on.

"Anybody besides Mr. Brock been here the last few days?"

"Yassir. Lemme see. Dr. Wylie about Mr. Trudeau's rheumatism, Squire McDermott about gettin' a clutch of Plymouth Rock eggs, young Mr. Archie McDermott to ask when Miss Judith was expected home, and Mr. Mallory from the feed store about buyin' this year's hay from the lower meadow, young Mr. Mallory shootin' in the meadow, too. Oh yassir—and Mr. Daumier—Squire McDermott's brother-in-law from New York."

"And what was it he wanted?"

"I don't know, sir. He's a friend of Mr. Trudeau's."

"And those are all the people who came visiting at the house a'ready?"

"Yassir."

Brock kept his eye closely on the colored man. His replies were cool enough but a number of tiny beads of perspiration had appeared close to the edge of his kinky hair unexplained by the coolness of the house.

"All right, Johnson. Tell us what happened now last night a'ready."

"Last night? Well, sir, nothin' happened last night, so far as I know. I went to bed—"

"Not so fast, yet. Did you cook Mr. Trudeau's supper?"

"Oh, yassir."

"Was he excited a little?"

"I never noticed. But he didn't eat much."

"Oh! He didn't eat much. And where did he go after supper?"

"Upstairs to his library—or den as I calls it."

"Did you see him again last night once?"

"Oh, nossir. I washed up, smoked a cigar an' went to bed."

"What time did you go to bed?"

"Around nine. I'd been choppin' wood in the afternoon an' I was tired."

"Where is your room?"

"Upstairs in de attic."

"On this side of the house?"

"Nossir. Over Miss Judith's room—yonder."

Mr. Krouse opened his coat, put his fingers in the armholes of his waistcoat and swayed back and forth for a moment, his little eyes snapping mischievously.

"You didn't hear anything during the night, Johnson?"

"Nossir. Nothing."

"When were you in the library yesterday a'ready?"

"Yestiddy mohnin' cleanin' up."

"And making the bed in the bedroom?"

"Yassir and puttin' things to rights."

"You've got more than one pair of shoes, Johnson?"

The apparent irrelevance of the question was rather startling. At least Johnson seemed to think so. For he blinked once or twice and rolled his eyes down toward his shabby brown laced shoes.

"Why, yassir, I spec I has."

"A pair of button shoes—black button shoes?"

Johnson had another sullen moment.

"Of course I can send Officer Coales to find out, maybe."

Johnson rolled his eyes up at his interlocutor while his gaze wavered.

"Yassir, I got buttoned shoes. But I don't see . . . ?"

Johnson paused. Brock chuckled. He did not comprehend the meaning of the questions, but he was now sure that he had been mistaken in his early estimate of this astonishing Mr. Krouse for the beads of perspiration on the forehead of Thomas Jefferson Johnson had increased in number and in size.

"You sleep pretty good, don't you, Johnson?" the inquisitor asked again.

"Y—yassir. I always did res' good."

"Never walk, now, in your sleep?"

"The which . . . ?"

"Walk? Get up in the night and come downstairs."

"No, *suh!* Not me. When I go to sleep, I stays asleep."

"H-m. And you didn't hear anything in the night? No sounds of voices angry? No sounds of a fight? No fall of a heavy body on the floor?"

"No, *suh.* I ain't heard nothin'."

Mr. Krouse took a pace or two up and down the passage.

"All right, Johnson. Now maybe you can tell us what happened this morning."

The colored man had been visibly disturbed by this close catechism. He rolled his eyes at Brock no more, now too intent, apparently, upon his alibi. As he did not at once reply Krouse questioned again.

"Did you knock on Mr. Trudeau's door this morning a'ready?"

"Nossir. I never knocks. I jes' calls. Mr. Trudeau is always up early; but he never comes down until about eight."

"And you prepared the breakfast same as always?"

"Yassir. Eggs, bacon, coffee an' toast, an' sot 'em on de table."

"And he didn't come down. What did you do then?"

"I went in de hall an' called him. But he didn't answer, or make any sound. I knocked on his do'—an' called again. But he didn't answer, so I opened de do' into de den—an' saw—what you all see now—"

"What did you do then once?"

" 'Twan't no place fo' me. I ran downstairs an' outside, jumped in de Fohd an' went to the police station in Laurel an' tole Mr. Coales what I'd seen. Mr. Coales he telephoned to Northampton and come here with me. An' dat's all, boss."

Mr. Krouse seemed already weary of the narrative and when the colored man finished, he waved him aside.

"All right. That will be all, Johnson. But you're not to go away from here without telling where you're going. Understand?"

Johnson swallowed uneasily and turned away but he did not go far—only a few paces away—where he stood uncertainly, looking queerly at Brock. Mr. Krouse after a moment turned toward him sharply.

"For why are you waiting around here?"

"Didn't you tole me not to go away?"

"I said—not to leave the house."

"Oh." But Johnson still lingered and Krouse turned on him.

"You go downstairs now. Get out!" And the colored man obeyed him.

Mr. Krouse's examination had its comical aspects but it was so thorough as to remove the comedy of his curious locutions. He inspired respect even in the consciousness of the case-hardened New Yorker.

The examination of Miss Judith Kennedy was quite perfunctory. Merely some questions as to her relations with Trudeau, the reasons for her return to Castle Rock which coincided so curiously with the tragedy. She answered quietly, hesitant and perturbed at moments but creating an excellent impression of affection for Trudeau and bewilderment at the suspicions caused by his sudden flight from the scene of death. Mr. Krouse, possibly in deference to her sex and her unhappiness, did not question her too closely, thus showing a consideration that still further increased Brock's good opinion. And, as Miss Kennedy expressed a desire to go to the house of a friend in Laurel until she could gather her thoughts together, he permitted her to depart in the car of the coroner who was in some haste to gather a jury to pass upon the crime.

As the others went down the stairs Krouse turned to Brock.

"Well, Mr. Brock, you tell me something, maybe. I let Johnson go, because I wanted to talk to you by myself. They say you know Trudeau pretty well. How well, now, do you know him?"

"A neighborly acquaintance, Mr. Krouse. I've been coming over once in a while to talk with him about books. I'm a literary man."

"So, you're a writer feller . . . ?"

Brock nodded. "Mystery stories."

"This is right in your line of business then. Ever notice anything mysterious-like about Trudeau?"

"Mysterious? Well . . . sometimes I thought he was a little nervous."

"Especial recent, maybe?"

"It may have been only a whim of mine. It's my business to be imaginative."

"I see. And what did you imagine?"

"Oh, I just thought he acted queerly."

"How did he act that was queer?"

"Well, when we were sitting here at night he'd get up in the middle of a conversation then stand by the window and listen."

"Did he ever, now, give you reasons for doing that?"

"He said that he'd been losing some of his chickens and wanted to find out what was taking them."

"Did you hear any sounds ever when he listened at the window?"

"Maybe an owl hooting."

"Did he have any other funny habits?"

"Well. There's a little blue piece of bronze on his desk. You can see it in there. It represents Satan rising triumphant from two prostrate bodies. When we weren't talking his gaze kept turning to it. It was a kind of fetish, I think. I once asked him where he had found the thing, but he evaded me."

"A fetish! What for kind of a fetish?"

"A fetish? You might call it a charm or an idol."

"Ah, idols! I understand. H—m. Did he have any other funny habits?"

"Not that I noticed—just mannerisms."

"What mannerisms?"

"He always had a way of throwing his arms suddenly at full length above his head, and then as suddenly dropping them—what Johnson called stretching himself."

"Nervousness?"

"Yes, perhaps."

"Anything else yet?"

"Nothing except that he'd seldom go off the place. Only out of the house to feed the chickens and gather eggs. I often asked him why he didn't visit his neighbors and he said he was a 'prisoner of hope,' whatever that means."

"A prisoner of hope—with the Devil for a fetish. That's funny, ain't?"

"I thought so. But he was very interesting. I took a fancy to him. And he seemed to like to talk to me."

Mr. Krouse frowned and swayed back and forth.

"Did it seem to you—this listening at windows might mean he was scared of somebody?"

"It might."

"Or something?"

"Perhaps."

"When were you here last?" Krouse asked.

"On Thursday, four . . . five days ago."

"Was he nervous then?"

"Preoccupied, I'd say—staring at his little blue statue of Beelzebub. He didn't want to talk. So I just borrowed a book and took it away."

"What did you want to see him for specially this morning a'ready?"

"About getting some information. I wanted to find out the effect of certain drugs on the human system to

fit a problem in a new tale that I'm working on. Mr. Trudeau is a great reader and knows a lot. I was hoping he could help me."

Mr. Krouse turned aside toward the door into the den.

"I guess that's all, Mr. Brock. I want to go over this case still, before the coroner gets back. The jury is likely to make a finding against Trudeau in this crime. But I've got some doubts maybe. . . ."

"I'm glad you have. I've had a good deal of experience in dealing with murder cases. The obvious inference is usually the wrong one. Have you thought that Mr. Trudeau might be dead also?"

"Yah. Already I thought of that, Mr. Brock. A little later maybe we know some more about Trudeau. I'm here to get some evidence together for the District Attorney. He's a nice young fella. Got a reputation to make though yet. If Trudeau's dead there's maybe nobody to prosecute. We'll see. You come with me, Mr. Brock, and look around a little."

CHAPTER III

THE DEVIL DECAMPS

KROUSE went to the body, carefully turning out the pockets. He showed disappointment that they contained no letters or anything that might suggest a clue to the identity of the man or his purposes in the house. There were some notes of expenditures written in a fine script in French which Brock translated, but of no importance; some American bank notes and a railroad ticket to New York in a pocketbook; in the trouser pocket some coins and a small brass case containing a tiny leaden image of Saint Rita; some cigarette papers and a tin of American tobacco. And that was all.

"If he'd had no ideas of being killed," Krouse muttered, "maybe he wouldn't have hidden his identity better."

Brock smiled at the strange convolutions of the sentence but Krouse had turned to the wound in the head.

"Something blunt—more blunt at the lower edge than the upper, maybe the butt end of a revolver. . . . The blow was struck from the front and on the right, showing a fair fight. The skull is crushed also. The blow was struck by a strong arm—"

"More powerful than Trudeau's?" Brock asked significantly. "He is seventy years old and suffers from rheumatism."

"Desperation makes a man sometimes stronger than ten. Just the same. . . ."

On closer examination of the hands one finger nail was found to be torn, a further indication of a struggle. On the table was a smear of blood and a finger print noted immediately by them both. But it was Brock who suddenly exclaimed:

"The Blue Devil! It's missing."

"Missing! The Devil! You're sure it was there a'ready?"

"Yes, sure. Right by the inkwell. Look. You can see the rim of dust around the place it was taken from. It couldn't have walked away itself. He must have taken it with him."

"There was no tricks in it? No hidden places to put waluables?"

"I don't know. The old man was so sensitive about the thing that I didn't dare examine it. It just looked like a very good piece by some modern Frenchman."

"Well, I don't know nothing about statues," Krouse growled.

He had taken off his hat, and was scratching his head.

"There's seldom a crime like this without a clear-cut motive, Mr. Krouse," Brock suggested.

"Maybe now, don't I know that, Mr. Brock?" the investigator replied peevishly. He sat down at the desk table and was going carefully through the drawer which was unlocked and the key was missing. Here was the notebook in which Trudeau kept his chicken-yard accounts—all carefully recorded in a small, almost feminine script. There was a book of stamps, a few letters from Miss Kennedy which Krouse took the liberty of reading—mere records of her life at college

and containing names and places which seemed to have no bearing upon the mystery. At least he told Mr. Brock this, putting the letters carefully into his breast pocket for further reference. Krouse examined carefully several slips of paper, one especially which he touched with a finger moistened at his lips.

"This here is funny," Krouse was muttering. "There's a waste basket maybe? Let's see it, Mr. Brock."

There were other small pieces of paper, two of which Mr. Krouse extracted and laid upon the desk beside the piece found in the drawer. Brock leaned over his shoulder excitedly. On four of the slips of paper were pencil marks, hurriedly scrawled; when two of them were fitted together, the numerals "5,000" could be plainly deciphered.

"Money straps from a bank!"

Krouse nodded, as he fitted two other slips of paper together. One of them showed two penciled ciphers, but the other figures had been torn off.

"The rest of this must be somewheres, Mr. Brock. Look in the fireplace, a minute."

Brock went down on his hands and knees and searched among the ashes which revealed nothing. "The nights are chilly still. He's had a fire here."

"All right. I've got some ideas. There's been a large sum of money in this drawer—inside of a few days, before that fire was lighted. Trudeau's money. I think we can trace that. By the folds in the papers that fit together it looks like that five thousand was in hundred dollar bills. These here other slips of paper show that there must have been several packages. Ten, fifteen, twenty thousand maybe also." Krouse settled

back in the old Frenchman's armchair and gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"I think we've found the motive you were speaking about, Mr. Brock," he growled.

Brock smiled. "You can't be convinced then, that Trudeau was responsible for this man's death."

"It's too early yet not to be convinced one way or another," Krouse replied dryly. "If this dead man knew Trudeau had all this money in the house and came upon the old man to rob him, Trudeau might have fought and killed the man when he was attacked. But the dead man hasn't any mark of the high-class crook or yet of a second story man neither. He looks like a working man dressed up for Sunday. His hands also show signs of hard work some time. And if he was a city crook, he'd have waited until everything was quiet and come in at the window by the trellis and rain spout. There's no signs. Now take the blackmail theory. Things look like that. Why should Trudeau bring this here money in the drawer of that desk, unless he drew it from the bank for some reason? He has no need for all this money here. Ten dollars or so would be all that he wanted in cash."

"And if he had drawn this money to pay blackmail," put in Brock quickly, "he'd have paid it out, wouldn't he—instead of fighting the dead man for its possession?"

"I see a'ready you follow me," said Krouse as he got up from the desk. "There's a reasonable doubt, Mr. Brock. The coroner now has made up his mind a'ready what his jury's verdict ought to be. Well, I've got different ideas. The old man's gone. Things cer-

tainly *look* bad for him but I've got to be shown once. . . ."

He got up from the chair and went down upon his hands crawling around the room, his face close to the floor. Brock stood for a moment in thought, aware that his own instinct as to Trudeau's innocence had not been amiss. He looked around at the familiar bookshelves as though hoping that these friends of Trudeau and himself could find words to speak; the sets of Hugo, Flaubert, and Zola with their familiar bindings; the collection of odd volumes of Anatole France, from which *Penguin Island,* the volume that he had borrowed last week was missing, for there was the space from which, with Trudeau's permission, Brock had taken it. He had intended bringing it back the first time he called again. In turning to watch the eager little man upon the floor he shifted his balance slightly and his hand caught the top of the bookshelves, about shoulder high. His fingers touched the edges of a book that lay there—a book that seemed familiar. Brock stared in amazement, turning rapidly to bewilderment that brought forth a slight exclamation. He glanced toward Krouse but the officer of the law was too intent upon his search for unconsidered trifles to hear him. Brock took the book down and opened it. It was the copy of *Penguin Island* that he had borrowed last Thursday. To make sure that this was not a duplicate copy, he read the familiar annotation that he had noticed when he first opened its pages. "E. Trudeau, October, 1924." The upper corner of the title-page was torn too, as in the book that Brock had borrowed. This *was* the book that he had borrowed, there was no doubt of it—the very book. And yet he knew he had seen it lying on

his own working table yesterday afternoon before he went out for his walk. The thing was most extraordinary—more than that—weird, unbelievable. This book, torn title-page and all, had duplicated itself. . . .

Puzzled and disturbed by this strange discovery, he tried to think of some logical way in which the transfer of the book could have been made—and without success. Perhaps he had been mistaken when he thought that he had seen *Penguin Island* on his work table this morning. He had learned recently that his memory could play the most extraordinary tricks. But this trick hardly seemed to have the dignity of the mystery with which it was surrounded. Who would have returned the book? Surely not Aunt Julia, who had never been inside the Trudeau house; nor Trudeau who never went off the place. Johnson? Why? Why should the old man's servant go to Magruder's for a book that the old man lent Brock. And surely Aunt Julia would have said something about such a visit. It was difficult to think straight about so strange an occurrence.

He seemed to have been thinking for a long time when he heard Mr. Krouse give a quick grunt of satisfaction. The little man was sitting on the floor at the corner of the bookshelves near where the body had lain, peering into the shadows at the corner. His figure, bent into his strange position seemed as small as a child's, but there was nothing childish in the peering angle of his bent head or the outthrust jaw and hooked nose. He seemed rather like an enormous bird of prey on the point of pecking at some choice morsel of food. As Brock looked, still bewildered by his own private discovery, Krouse straightened.

"You've found something?" Brock asked.

"Yah." Krouse made no motion to rise and only began fumbling in his trouser pocket, in a pleased sort of a way. "Old Trudeau made any habits of shooting at rats?" he asked.

"Are you crazy?"

"Not ex-act-ly!" said Krouse grinning again. "But there's a bullet hole down here in the molding, beside the bookcase."

"A bullet hole!"

"Yes, a new bullet hole with white splinterings around the edges also. And where there's bullet holes there's maybe bullets." He had taken a huge clasp-knife from his pocket and began cutting into the woodwork. "Bullets are useful things in this kind of business," he grunted as he worked. "Where there's a—bullet there must have been—a gun. It isn't far in, very. Ah, here it is—a twenty-eight—or a thirty-two—it might be," he said slowly. "Do you know anything about pistols, Mr. Brock?"

"A little."

"Well tell me what you think of it once." Krouse handed it to Brock who turned the thing over in his fingers. "H-m, there's something unusual about it."

"So you saw also—the nickel tip. That's a foreign idea, Brock."

"German."

"You think so, or French. We'll find out about that, maybe."

Krouse relaxed in his sitting posture like a tired child. But Brock saw that he wasn't tired in the least, for his smile had grown into a grin and he chuckled audibly. He saw Brock's look of inquiry.

"For why you wonder I laugh? Well, it's just I was thinking how much noise, now, a pistol makes when it is shot off in the middle of the night. And Johnson not to hear it. Maybe, he don't sleep like hell when he gets going good! Ain't?"

Brock agreed that Johnson was a fine sleeper.

Krouse put his knife into his pocket and resumed his crawling around the room. Brock watched him curiously. No detail of floor or rug was too small to escape notice. He picked something up, scrutinized it carefully and then bent to his task again, pouncing at last like a terrier upon an object in the fringe of the rug, in the shadow beyond the desk. At last, his task apparently completed, he stood up, grinning like a gargoyle.

"Well, we're getting warmer, Mr. Brock," he said with a laugh that transformed the longitudinal furrows of his long face into concentric rings, and disclosed a gold tooth that gleamed pleasantly. "We're getting a lot warmer. Maybe nearer the facts without being able to settle on anybody yet at all."

"You mean—that Trudeau did not do the killing."

"There you go so fast again. I'm not saying that. He might of done it, but there were others that might of done it too."

"Others!" Brock gasped.

Krouse nodded with a wolfish smile, then went to the body, turning it over on its back and carefully scrutinizing its collar. Then he straightened and spoke with an oracular air.

"There was one other man in this room last night, beside Trudeau and that fellow there, Mr. Brock—maybe two others."

The man's assurance was surprising.

"How do you deduce that?"

Krouse exhibited two small objects in the palm of his hand. One was a paper match, the other a safety pin.

"Trudeau didn't, now, smoke much or there would be an ash receiver somewheres."

"I always knocked my pipe against the fender," Brock admitted.

"A box of safety matches would last him a long while maybe; as he never went to the village he wouldn't use these paper matches they hand out at cigar stores."

"No. But I do," Brock said, taking a clip of them from his coat pocket. "That paper match might be one of mine."

"But Johnson cleaned up here yesterday. Let's see your paper matches."

Krouse took the burnt bit of paper and compared it with the matches in Brock's paper packet.

"They're just alike. Where did you get these matches?"

"They give them to you at Snyder's cigar store in Laurel."

Krouse handed the clip of matches to Brock.

"Do you, now, smoke cigarettes?" Krouse asked.

"Not when I can help it. I'm a pipe smoker."

The little man examined Brock's face soberly. Then he broke into another of his ghoulish smiles.

"That's all right, Mr. Brock. I'm not accusing you of the murder yet. You shouldn't be worried a'ready. This paper match," he said, holding it up, "was used to light a cigarette—a manufactured cigarette."

"Ashes?"

"Two traces of them. Dr. Burlingame walked on a

third trace maybe when he went first into the bedroom. Look close—there by the end wall under that there chair. See them? Almost dust. The dead man rolled his own. And that kind leaves bits of burned tobacco instead of dust."

"Where's the cigarette end?"

"Where I thought it was. Outside on the drive under the window. Come, I show you, I saw it a'ready."

From the window Brock followed the direction of Krouse's long index finger. There *was* a cigarette end lying in the road.

This small-town investigator was giving the ex-reporter a lesson in cool analysis and deduction that might have been profitable to some of the bluffers and third degree men of the New York Police Department. For a moment he had thought of telling Mr. Krouse of the extraordinary duplication of the volume of *Penguin Island* but he decided for the present that the matter was irrelevant—especially as Mr. Krouse was standing before him holding a small object carefully between thumb and forefinger for Brock's inspection.

"There's all kinds of safety pins, Mr. Brock. Little and big ones. Common brass or black enamel ones, which might tell nothing. This safety pin is now, gold—I think solid also. There's several kinds of gold safety pins. Some of them mothers buy for babies, others are used by ladies in fastening their wraps. But this here pin gives me a better picture of the third man in this room last night than anything else that has been found yet. Such pins like these are used by the swell dressers to pin their soft collars back of their ties. This fella I'm thinking of is something of a sport and in need of money also. He had something to do with the

death of this man. The hasp is bent so I won't put him apast some part in the fighting in this here room. The pin was torn from his collar and fell into the fringe of the rug. I don't say the owner of this pin was the murderer, but I'll bet a pound of scrapple that he wanted to know what was going to be done with Trudeau's money a'ready."

"Sounds reasonable," said Brock. "But I'm still puzzled. Something you said a while ago indicated that you thought there might have been a fourth man in this room last night."

Krouse frowned. "Ah, Mr. Brock, but that's, now, something I keep to myself," he said dryly.

Brock followed to the bedroom door. If he had hoped he could be of any assistance in picking up clues, he found himself completely at a loss before the initiative of the extraordinary little man from Northampton who seemed to anticipate any thought or suggestion that could be made. He had not been unduly impressed by the intelligence of the casual Pennsylvania Germans of the village. He knew them to be shrewd in their financial dealings but had not expected to find the kind of shrewdness shown by Mr. Krouse in a calling always associated in his mind with the hard-boiled, plain-clothes men around Police Headquarters in the great city. Brock realized that he had been constantly tempted into a very common error of judging a man's sagacity by the deficiencies in his culture. But he was now convinced that Mr. Krouse was a rare one. He entered the bedroom and watched the little man poking around the room, slowly, methodically, opening bureau drawers, turning over articles of clothing and at last going down on his knees inside the closet and examining the floor,

grunting and muttering to himself all the while, misusing adverbs and conjunctions to his heart's content.

At last slowly he got up and dusted the knees of his baggy trousers.

"I guess we don't find nothing more here now. It looks like Trudeau went away in too much of a hurry to be dead. He wanted people to think maybe somebody else mussed up the room. But he was too particular how careful he mussed it—no bureau drawers emptied out, or things under the bed. If he's dead now I've got to do some better guessing. It was Trudeau fixed this room like it is. I'll risk some bets on that. And he didn't leave no secrets behind him except the letters of the young lady which don't tell much and what the dead man could tell and he don't tell nothing. But I'm ready when the jury comes. The dead man was killed by a person or persons unknown. That will be the verdict, I guess, Mr. Brock."

"That's right. If there was another man—"

"There was, Mr. Brock. Two other men."

Krouse led the way to the door. "I don't have this investigating to do much ever," he confided. "Just bootleggers and moonshiners once in a while." He turned to Brock with a grin. "For ten years a'ready I've been wanting somebody to get murdered in Northampton County, so I could find out who killed him."

"Well, you've got your chance, Mr. Krouse."

"Yah. Do you play chess sometimes, Mr. Brock? It's a great game. Me and the old woman, we play in the evenings. Sometimes a'ready she thinks she beats me. But I never let her know that she don't. For why? It don't do no good if the woman that cooks for you thinks she's worser as you are in anything."

CHAPTER IV

JUDITH

WITH the arrival of the coroner's jury to view the body, Brock was permitted to leave the house, with the understanding that he was to appear the following morning to be questioned. The driveway outside was filled with farmers and people from Northampton and Laurel in automobiles, but he evaded all questioners and went home at once, full of the riddle that the little man Krouse had propounded to him.

The first thing Brock did when he reached his Aunt Julia's was to go directly to his room, to find out whether the copy of *Penguin Island* that he had borrowed from Trudeau was on his table where he had supposed it was. He knew that it was a possibility for two copies of the same edition of a book to be in Trudeau's house, even two copies with the signature and date; but it was unbelievable that the dog-eared title-page should be the same in both.

More than slightly astonished by the morning's experience, he did not know whether to be gratified or disappointed to find that the copy of *Penguin Island* was not on his table. He was certain now that he had finished reading the book, that it had been on his table yesterday and that he had not returned it to Trudeau. Who then had taken the book back to Trudeau's library? Mrs. Magruder had gone to the village to do her morning's marketing and so he awaited her re-

turn, the puzzle of the book still bothering him. He realized that he was in a condition of mind when trifles are magnified and he knew of course that it didn't matter to anybody one way or another whether *Penguin Island* was at Trudeau's house or Mrs. Magruder's. But the thought of it hung in the back of his mind and would not be driven out even by his new interest in the Castle Rock mystery.

But he was sure of one thing—he thought no more about his own mystery story, which, for the first time in weeks, had gone out of his mind as completely as though he had never begun it. For here at his very door was a mystery based on the realities that were so conspicuously lacking in his own creation. Krouse was no figure of romance, as the detective in his new book had turned out to be, but the most commonplace of individuals with a curious talent for negligible facts. Brock had, somehow, a great confidence in Krouse. The conclusions that the man had reached, while still remaining to be proved by further evidence, were the result of the most painstaking investigation and confirmed Brock's judgment of Trudeau as a man who would not even under great provocation commit the crime suggested by his flight. Krouse's evidence, frail as it was, would create the necessary doubt in the minds of the coroner's jury and thus perhaps slightly alleviate the suffering of Miss Judith Kennedy. She was, of course, fond of her uncle by marriage, for the Frenchman was a person who, in spite of many peculiarities, was possessed of a singular charm.

Brock was no squire of dames. At least he hadn't been since he had come back from overseas and found the girl he had been engaged to married to the other

fellow. He was, you might say, no longer interested in women except as the bauble of an idle hour much better given to golf or a volume of essays by the fireside. And the feeling inspired by Miss Judith Kennedy's position in her home town came from Brock's desire to be helpful to one in distress. He knew that he might make her isolation and pain less poignant if he told her of Krouse's investigation and its probable effect on the minds of the coroner's jury. He therefore decided to visit the Hawleys' house, where she had temporarily taken refuge, and offer her what cheer he could. As one of Trudeau's friends, he thought it reasonable that she should accept this kindly attention.

Mrs. Magruder, flustered by the news of the crime as she had heard it garbled in the stores of the village, found her nephew waiting for her in the parlor. The talk in Laurel was to the effect that Trudeau would be found guilty by the coroner's jury, that the police were on his track and that he would probably be arrested before the day had passed.

"I always said there was something queer about that man. Any one who can live next door to you for five years without passing the time of day ought to be looked on with suspicion. I've always thought he'd come to a bad end and I couldn't understand, Joe, how you could be so intimate with him. That poor girl, Judith Kennedy, coming home to a house like that!"

"Do you know her, Aunt Julia?" he asked.

"Yes. We used to meet in summer in the village and walk home together sometimes. Such a nice girl, and clever. I'm so sorry for her. I'd invite her here to stay until after things are settled if I thought she'd come."

"She's gone to the Hawleys'."

"Oh, has she? Well, she and Jessie Hawley used to go to school together." Mrs. Magruder put her packages on the table and sat flushed with excitement and interest. "Now tell me, Joe, all you know about it. They say it was you found the body when you went over there this morning. What sort of a looking person is the dead man? Anybody you ever saw around the neighborhood? What do you think he wanted of Trudeau? They say his skull was crushed in just as if it had been an eggshell. Wasn't it dreadful—the blood and everything? Wonderful how that old man had the strength to do it!"

Brock smiled indulgently. In the uneventful lives of people like his Aunt Julia, an affair like this was a conversational godsend. He told her briefly his own part in the happenings at Castle Rock and gave her a summary of the activities of Mr. Julius Krouse. She had never heard of him. The Northampton Krouses, it appeared, were of baser metal than the Jonas Krouses of Laurel who owned—as every one knew—a majority interest in the Laurel Mountain House.

A casual question about the volume of *Penguin Island* elicited from Aunt Julia the information that if she had noticed the book she knew no more than her nephew did about its disappearance from the house.

"That's certainly strange," was his comment. "I may be nerve-fagged—but I've certainly not lost my mind—not yet. And I'd swear on a pile of Bibles that that book was on my desk yesterday morning."

"Are you sure you didn't carry it over when you went out gunning yesterday afternoon?"

"Of course I'm sure. I went off in the opposite direction toward Laurel woods."

"Well, why bother? It hasn't anything to do with the murder and who cares now whether you returned it or not!"

In the afternoon, on his way to the village, Brock went to the Hawley place and told Jessie Hawley, who came to the door, that he had some information that Miss Kennedy might like to have. She came down at once, apologizing for her appearance, though he saw nothing to apologize for. Her eyes were red as though she had been crying, but she listened to him gravely while he told her what had happened at Castle Rock after her departure, and of his own belief that while Mr. Trudeau could not be exonerated until he returned and proved his innocence, the coroner's jury would probably find on the evidence presented that the slain man had come to his death at the hands of a person or persons unknown. She thanked him for his kindness, and he resolved again to help her through this difficulty for Trudeau's sake and for her own. She was very close to tears and her face, which he had found not in the least classic, was no less appealing than when they had first met. For a bouquet of wild flowers loses nothing in beauty by being touched by the dew.

"It's all so terrible, Mr. Brock," she said helplessly. "I can't—I won't believe that Uncle Emile. . . . He was always excitable, emotional, nervous—and recently even apprehensive of I don't know what—but he was very kind. And to kill a man! No, that's impossible!"

She raised her chin and her eyes flashed their confidence in her assertion.

"Of course you're right," he said gently. "Emile

Trudeau is not of the stuff that murderers are made of. And yet," he added thoughtfully, "if he had been attacked—"

She caught at the phrase eagerly. "Yes, if he had been attacked he would have been justified in defending himself."

"Of course. That may be proven. Perhaps he will come back and prove it."

He paused as he approached the question suggested by his own observation and her previous remarks.

"You said your uncle was apprehensive. Had you noticed that when you were home last—or earlier even? Have you any reason to believe that he feared any one?"

"Yes, I—" She stopped as though she feared that her reply might be incriminating.

He said nothing for a moment and then, as he found her blue eyes regarding him soberly, he smiled.

"I want to help you if I can, before you are questioned by the police again. Your uncle has been very friendly to me. I would like to help him too. Perhaps you'd better tell me if you think he seemed to be in any sort of danger—if he had had any warning of the visit of this stranger."

"I don't know." She hesitated a moment longer and then searched her visitor's face eagerly as though for signs of any dissimulation. He returned her gaze steadily unable to repress a smile of friendliness and utter sympathy. This, it seemed, disarmed her.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Brock, for I think you can be trusted. When I came home during the Easter holidays, I thought Uncle Emile seemed to be acting strangely. We had always been so happy together.

And while he would never leave the place, except to go to the bank, and constantly refused to meet strangers, he seemed very contented with his books, his chickens and his vegetable garden. They seemed to be all that he needed. But at Easter he seemed to be moody and unsettled, nervous at times and very quiet at others. I thought I had always understood him, but there were things about him then that I did not understand. He watched the mail with an eagerness that was very different from his composure during my aunt's lifetime. Then he seemed to have no cares and asked nothing of the world but to be left alone with his own pleasant and harmless pursuits. I have been worried about him. I have worried a great deal about my own selfishness in being away from him at Bryn Mawr when I felt that my duty was at his side. But I wrote him constantly, telling him what I was doing and trying to make my letters a substitute for myself. And then ten days ago I had a letter from him, a curious letter. It puzzled me. It hinted at sickness, loneliness and the uncertainty of life at his age. It was not like him, because he isn't a hypochondriac."

"You thought this letter showed an unusual condition of mind?" Brock asked.

"Yes, it did. I wrote him a long letter. For several days there was no response. And then suddenly I had another letter—" She paused.

"A letter showing definite apprehension?"

"Yes. Definite—the letter showed fear of something immediate and terrible."

"I see. Then your return just at this time was not accidental."

"No. That's why I took the night train. I was

afraid—the terrible something that he feared might happen before I could get here. And it did." She bent her head for a moment and then spoke again, her voice trembling. "I'm not sure that I could have been of any use, or prevented what—what—happened, but I—I might have been able to give him some comfort or—if he had told me the whole truth—even have been able to help him in some way. I don't know. I don't know what it's all about, you see, any more than you do. I only know that I believe implicitly in Uncle Emile's innocence and I pray God that the danger, whatever it is that has threatened him, has not followed him where he has gone. I've found myself thinking that Uncle Emile is dead. It's all so horrible—"

"I think, yes, I feel certain that your Uncle Emile is alive, Miss Kennedy—and safe."

"How could he be safe with these threats hanging over him? The threat of what drove him away—the threat of his capture by the police—"

Brock wanted to reassure her, but realized that there was nothing that he could say that would give her more courage than she already possessed. But he could give her the benefit of his opinions and some practical advice, suggested by her admissions.

"I don't have to tell you how sorry I am," he said slowly after a moment. "Assuming that your uncle is alive, which I take to be the case, you are placed in a difficult position. Of course your return to your uncle's house just after the body had been found, had suggested to my mind the thought that you had been sent for. The coincidence is too startling not to have been noticed by Mr. Krouse. His examination of you this morning was too perfunctory to be above suspicion.

I'm afraid that at the inquest the questions will be more searching. Your letters to your uncle were found in his desk by Mr. Krouse. I don't know what is in them but Krouse may have been able to read your anxiety between the lines. I'm afraid so. Therefore I think, unless you have some reason for concealment, that you ought to be quite frank before the coroner's jury."

She glanced out of the window and then around the room uncertainly.

"I want to do what would help Uncle Emile the most," she said at last. "Oh, don't you understand that something I might say, if I was frank, some admission of my anxiety might place him in a still worse position? I don't know what to do. If I thought that any word of mine would convict him of this crime I should be unhappy the rest of my life. I can't do that. I mustn't."

"I understand your feelings, Miss Kennedy," Brock said gently, "but you've told me that you know nothing of the danger that threatened your uncle. Nothing that you testified to could be as damaging as your uncle's flight. In fact, any testimony as to a threatened danger might be construed as a point in his favor. I mean, of course, self-defense."

"Yes. I've thought of that," she replied quietly. "But then if he was attacked and killed the man in defending himself why did he run away? Why didn't he stay here, give himself up to the police, and tell the whole story?" she asked miserably.

"There's an answer to that, of course. There are some facts that he did not dare to reveal."

"What do you mean, Mr. Brock?"

"I can't explain except to tell you my own impres-

sions of your uncle's habits and his mental attitude. His way of speaking figuratively about life, for instance. Why did he call himself a prisoner of hope?"

"Yes," she said. "I've heard him use that phrase. He used it in one of his letters."

"It seemed to me to suggest a reference to the past of which I knew nothing. What was the significance of the little blue bronze on his library table? That too was figurative—Satan rising, escaping from, or is it triumphant over, two prostrate souls? You must have noticed—"

"Yes. I hated the thing. It is horrible. It always seemed to exercise a singular fascination for him."

"Did you know that the statuette has vanished?"

She stared at him, startled.

"You mean—"

"He must have taken it with him."

This information seemed to have disturbed her greatly.

"How very strange!" she gasped.

"Do you know anything about the thing?" he asked. "I mean—how it came into his possession, or why he seemed to treasure it so highly?"

She did not reply at once and when she did her voice had no life in it. She turned her head away from him and stared fixedly at the figures in the carpet.

"No—I—I know nothing about it," she said.

He thought that she seemed suddenly to grow very tired and got up at once to go. This aroused her to a sense of her obligations for she rose and took his proffered hand impulsively.

"Oh, please, don't think I'm ungrateful. You've been very kind, Mr. Brock. I do thank you. You're

trying to help me, but I must find my way alone, I'm afraid. I'll have to be guided by my instincts to do what's best for my uncle. It's very dreadful to me to think of him, an old man, not in the best of health, a fugitive from justice, still terrified perhaps at this nameless something that still pursues him."

"Perhaps he will write you."

"I pray that he will. I would go to him wherever he is."

There was fire in her devotion to the old man, confirming Brock's own opinion of the unfortunate Emile Trudeau; for no one who brought forth such affection could be as guilty as his flight had shown him to be.

Leaving the Hawleys' house Brock went to the village to attend to a commission for his aunt. He had made up his mind not to discuss the crime publicly and had indeed been cautioned by Julius Krouse not to do so, but slight as his acquaintance was with the people of the village, he found himself immediately the center of interest at the drug store under the corner of the Laurel Mountain House, which was a sort of meeting place both winter and summer for the people of the village. The proprietor of the store, Mr. Ritter, with a sense of reflected glory in waiting upon an important witness in the only murder mystery Laurel had ever known, insisted on asking him questions about his experiences in a loud tone of voice which attracted the attention of his other visitors. Brock answered quietly, giving only the obvious facts as the whole village already knew them. He wanted to be waited on so that he could escape the gathering crowd, but Mr. Ritter showed an irritating desire to prolong the visit and while he talked, waited on his other customers first.

Dr. Wylie came in. He had been Trudeau's physician and Brock had called on him once or twice, at Mrs. Magruder's suggestion, at moments when he had needed some quieting influence for his agitated nerves. Brock liked Dr. Wylie. He knew something about nerves. He had had a breakdown himself once before he had moved from Philadelphia to Laurel. He was a wholesome individual, a friend of Mrs. Magruder's, with the best heart in the world, whose only faults were his loquacity and his desire to dominate a situation. Here was an opportunity not to be missed. So he put his arm around Brock's shoulders and insisted on introducing him to all the other people in the store. Brock did not wish to hurt Dr. Wylie's feelings by wriggling free and escaping to the street, a course that he might have been justified in taking under the circumstances, so he endured the publicity in silence.

"This is Mr. Joseph Brock, gentlemen, the famous author of *A Leap in the Dark,* a patient of mine—oh, nothing serious, just too much nerves from overwork. Joe, you ought to know these people—Dave Mallory keeps the flour and feed store—Bill Slosson farms out your way—Henry Hawley runs the coal yard and ice plant—George Reifsnyder, assistant manager of the Laurel Mountain House—and here's Squire McDermott, just coming in. Good evening, Squire. I guess you've met Joe Brock—comes from the big city you left to come to God's country."

"How are you, Mr. Brock?" said McDermott. He was short and stout with a suggestion, not to be noted in other Laurellians, of the city about his manner and dress. He had tawny gray hair and a face empurpled by good living and the weather—one of the rich men

of the community, Brock understood, a former alderman in the old days in New York, now a chicken breeder and gentleman farmer, with an interest in the Laurel Mountain House. He had a large fat hand and flapped it into Brock's in a perfunctory manner.

"I hear you were one of the people who found the body up at Castle Rock," he went on. "Very terrible case. The only murder in Northampton County in twenty years, they say. Emile Trudeau's gone, too. Looks bad for him. I liked Trudeau. What he didn't know about Barred Rocks, wasn't worth knowing. But murder! Well, we can't stand for that around here, can we Wylie?"

"I can't believe Trudeau did it," Dr. Wylie said stanchly. "He wouldn't have had the strength."

"Well," growled the ex-alderman, "why the hell didn't he stay here and face the thing out? I reckon people would have tried to help him see it through. There wasn't anything—" he made a significant circular motion with his forefinger at his temple, "wrong with him up here? My boy Archie said he seemed pretty queer when he was up last week asking about Judith. What do you think, Mr. Brock? You were a friend of his."

"I never thought he was queer in the least," Brock said, "certainly not in the way you mean, Mr. McDermott. And when a man's seventy he's got a right to his peculiarities."

"Ha, ha. So he has. I guess some people around here think I'm queer—when they try to get money out of me." The ex-alderman's face drew into sober lines almost at once, as he turned back to Brock. "Well, what's your idea of the motive, Mr. Brock?"

"I haven't any idea that I'd care to talk about—at least *not yet,*" he added dryly and with emphasis.

"Oh, I see. Well, excuse me. You're a witness, aren't you? Coroner's jury sits in the schoolhouse, don't it? I'll have to be there. Well, good-by, everybody."

Brock at last succeeded in making his purchases and evading the curiosity of those he met. Mr. McDermott seemed to have given voice to the opinions of most of the people of Laurel that Trudeau was the guilty man. Trudeau had not made many friends in the community and they all expressed their indifference to his fate in this casual cruelty. Only Dr. Wylie and Henry Hawley, at whose home Judith Kennedy was staying, expressed their belief that Trudeau would be exonerated. Opinions differed as to Julius Krouse, who had taken charge of the investigation. McDermott had referred to him as a fat-headed Dutchman. Mr. Slosson said he wouldn't hire him to throw garbage to his pigs. George Reifsnyder said the Krouses of Laurel never had much use for the Northampton Krouses; and asked what could be expected of an ivory-headed clerk in the District Attorney's office. Brock made no replies to these comments for he did not want to be drawn into any controversies. But he had already made up his mind that Mr. Krouse was possessed of talents of which these people were unaware.

He excused himself at last and withdrawing from Dr. Wylie's ostentatious friendliness hurried home with his purchases to Aunt Julia. That night, of course, over the supper table Mrs. Magruder could talk of nothing but the murder, until her daughter, a schoolgirl of twelve, began giving signs of fright and

hysteria at the approach of darkness, when by common consent the subject was abandoned. And when little Julia, her lessons finished in some sort of a way, was sent up to bed, she demanded that Mrs. Magruder should go upstairs with her.

When they had disappeared and the house became quiet, Brock laid aside the newspaper and took out a pad trying to set down in orderly fashion the lines of investigation that might lead to the solution of the mystery. For Krouse had, in a way, taken Brock into his confidence and deserved whatever help the newspaper writer could give him. Brock wrote the clues down in a column thus:

1. Finger prints to be photographed:
   (*a*) One on book.
   (*b*) One on desk. Note: Are they different?
2. The dead man.
   (*a*) He was a Frenchman. Perhaps he and Trudeau had known each other on the other side.
   (*b*) Had he left some trace in Laurel or Northampton?
3. People Who came to the house: Dr. Wylie, Squire McDermott, Archie McDermott, Mallory, the feed man, his son, and a Mr. Daumier. Find out about Daumier.
4. The safety pin.
   (*a*) Torn from a shirt. Query: A small fragment of the shirt might be found somewhere in the room.
5. The meaning (or influence) of the Blue Devil.

6. If Trudeau killed the man, where is the money?
7. If Trudeau is dead who has taken it?
8. Get on the track of Trudeau.
9. Watch Johnson. Search his room.
10. Possible footprints in soft ground outside. Note: mud on slain man's shoes.
11. Krouse's question about buttoned shoes.
12. The paper match.
13. See Cashier of Bank.
14. *Penguin Island*—irrelevant but startling.

Having made these notations Brock sat and stared at them, adding a note here, a query there, planning in the morning to find Krouse and offer help on every one of these lines of investigation. He was intensely interested in the problem and so absorbed in his thoughts that he was oblivious of the passage of time.

But at last he put the list aside and sat down, thoroughly weary from his long day. Curiously enough a delicious languor came over him and he closed his eyes, yielding to it. Nice girl, Judith Kennedy, fine forehead, lovely smile after tears . . . like a rainbow-end after rain. He must try to. . . .

Suddenly Brock started upright, drowsy no more. There was a sound—an unusual sound at the window near him—as though some one were fumbling at the shutters, which Mrs. Magruder always fastened at night. And as he looked something appeared, wriggling between the slats, a square white object, and with a slight tap against the pane, fell upon the sill. Fully awake to the fact of an unusual visitor and thinking quickly, instead of opening the window, he rushed to

the door, out on the portico, and around the house. The night was pitch black after the glare of the room so that it was a long moment before his eyes were accustomed to the obscurity, but he was certain that he could make out a shadow flitting among the trees in the direction of Trudeau's place. He ran a few paces staring into the darkness but he saw nothing more nor heard any sound. So he went into the house, standing in the hallway listening for a moment. Fortunately, the commotion he had made had awakened no one. So he went into the dining room, raised the window and removed the square white object from where it had fallen. It was an envelope and bore his name printed with a pencil in square letters. Brock opened it under the glare of the lamp. The contents were also printed roughly in pencil and he read a message as follows:

KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT AT THE INQUEST OR YOU'LL BE IN WRONG, FOR THE GOODS ARE ON YOU.

There was no signature. Brock read the thing again and again, more and more puzzled and astonished. What did it all mean? "You'll be in wrong for the goods are on you—" Extraordinary message—and surely a mistake. And yet who could have written it (and of course delivered it), but some one interested in concealing the actual criminal. A warning and a threat. But why warn or threaten one whose testimony was no more valuable than that of any one else who had seen the body—Johnson, Krouse, Dr. Burlingame, for instance?

Trudeau! The thought came in a flash—then al-

most as quickly was relinquished. The old Frenchman would hardly have been equal to such a hurried flight in the dark. And why would Trudeau be warning him to keep his mouth shut when he knew that Brock had no knowledge whatever of the killing or of any of the events that had led up to it.

The murderer himself! There seemed no doubt about that. The man who had done the killing had been here just outside the window, less than ten minutes ago. It seemed as though the Fates, just to tantalize him in his quest, had put opportunity in his way and then as suddenly withdrawn it. And as he read the message, he had a growing conviction that there was no nonsense about it, that the man who had written and brought it was desperately in earnest. A lunatic? That was a possibility not suggested by any of the evidence brought to light by Julius Krouse. Who but a lunatic would write to Brock, "You'll be in wrong, for the goods are on you"? That meant that the bearer of the message wished to incriminate Brock in order to keep him silent on the witness stand as to Trudeau. Or perhaps the murderer thought that Trudeau's friendship for Brock was great enough to make him the recipient of the old man's confidences of names and facts, a history of the past, and the possible threats that had made Trudeau so apprehensive during the weeks leading up to the crime itself.

In these ways Brock tried to invent plausible explanations to fit the case and only succeeded in getting his mind more confused. He paced the floor, staring from time to time at the paper in his hand, until late into the night, when Mrs. Magruder, hearing his footsteps, came down stairs in her wrapper and, believing

him to be still suffering from the insomnia that had been his plague for weeks, took him by the arm, turned out the light, and sent him up to bed.

He said nothing of the real reason why he paced the floor. She was already disturbed over the terrible affair in their quiet community and there was no need to alarm her needlessly.

CHAPTER V

OUT OF THE PAST

IT was the constant hammering of one persistent thought that had brought Brock to the edge of collapse. Now a new interest with a different kind of persistence (you might say a different rate of vibration) had created a sort of mental confusion that broke up the tension. After struggling for a while with this new problem, his brain refused to think any longer and he slept.

It was Mrs. Magruder who called him in the morning and a glance at the clock showed to his surprise that it was eight o'clock. He had slept seven hours.

Her message was imperative.

"I didn't want to wake you, but Julius Krouse is downstairs and says he's got to see you at once."

Brock sprang up.

"Tell him I'll be down in five minutes." And then as an afterthought—"If he's in a hurry tell him to come up here while I dress."

Brock had just slipped on a pair of trousers when there was a knock on the door and Julius Krouse was shown in. The longitudinal lines in his long face had deepened, he needed a shave, his stiff sandy gray hair was rumpled and he looked very tired. But his eyes were bright under their heavy brows and his chin seemed to have grown squarer in the night.

"Sorry to get you up a'ready, Mr. Brock, but I've got to have you help me anyways."

"Sit down. Had any breakfast?"

"No. Been up all night."

Brock put his head outside the door, calling to his Aunt Julia for breakfast for two.

"Don't you, now, bother about me. A cup of coffee maybe—"

Brock waved his hand as he gazed at the little man.

"Well—anything new?"

Krouse nodded and spoke shortly.

"Trudeau took the milk train at two o'clock in the morning at Baker's Crossing. The railroad people traced him for me as far down as Reading. There we lost him."

"Philadelphia?"

"Yah, or maybe New York. I can't do nothing more yet awhile with Trudeau. We know now he ain't dead. We get out bills with his description. We find him maybe by and by. But there's other lines. I can't work 'em alone. I got to have help anyways."

Brock nodded. "I was going to look for you this morning. Something's turned up, Mr. Krouse. See here—" And he gave the little man the envelope and slip of paper that had come through the shutter the night before. Krouse stared at the message frowning and then read aloud slowly.

"Keep your mouth shut at the inquest or you'll be in wrong, for the goods are on you."

Then he looked up at Brock, his gaze slowly concentrating.

"You!" he said. "Why should *you* be keeping your mouth shut? What you got to hide?"

Brock laughed. "That's what *I* want to know."

"What goods anybody got on you?"

"Nothing. I take it as a sort of threat. But I don't know why anybody should threaten me."

And briefly he told Krouse exactly what had happened. The man did not take his gaze from Brock while he spoke but the lines in his face twisted in almost comic bewilderment.

"Kind of nutty. Ain't?" he muttered. "It's maybe a joke a'ready."

"No. It's no joke. . . . The man who wrote that thinks I know he committed the crime."

"For why should he think you know it?"

"I don't know. Unless he believes Trudeau told me enough of what he was scared of, so that I could guess the rest."

"And Trudeau didn't now—tell you nothing?"

Brock turned irritably from the mirror where he was tying his cravat. "Good God, man, do you think I'm fool enough to monkey with a buzz saw like this?"

Krouse smiled.

"No," he said quietly, "but I just wanted to see how you'd act up."

Brock laughed good-humoredly.

"Well, I don't know anything about that message or the man that sent it, any more than you do. I wish I'd had sense enough to run through the woods after him."

"I guess then maybe, you wouldn't be here, tying your necktie."

"Then you've stopped thinking it was a joke?"

"I never yet thought so," said Krouse. And then after a silence, while Brock brushed his hair—"But

you got to say something when things come sideways at you, ain't? It's got no sense to it with the other clues. It's all *schtrublich.*" He went to the window and examined the paper more carefully. "There's paper like this in Laurel, maybe."

Brock led the way down to the breakfast table and Krouse followed silent and deep in thought. But his fit of abstraction did not prevent him from eating ravenously of eggs, sausage, and hot cakes. Mrs. Magruder hovered, rather dubious about the importance of this fellow Krouse from Northampton who had not been taught that knife and fork are not interchangeable implements. When she went out into the kitchen Mr. Krouse took out of his pocket a cigar like a corkscrew that had been run over by a trolley. This he lighted while Brock filled his pipe.

"Us, we ain't got long to stay here but this stogie make me think better once. This case is getting complict—complicated—Mr. Brock. It looks more so since this *bartich* note you got. We got to forget that this morning. Maybe something happens later and we think of it again. . . . I got to go to Trudeau's and make some finger prints—Trooper Coales is there, all right. Also I got to ask Johnson some things, maybe look in his room in the attic again. Also see some footprints around the house where nobody's been. I guess maybe later you and me, we find some footprints here also. But I can't be two places all at once, now can I? You got to go to Northampton and try to find out if this dead man left any traces. He couldn't stay in Laurel, the Laurel Mountain House ain't open for the season a'ready. This Frenchman must have stayed in Northampton. You go to the hotels there, maybe

when I'm through at Trudeau's I come down and go with you to see the bank cashier this after."

Brock grinned with satisfaction. Mr. Krouse had covered almost every important clue that Brock had noted.

"But the inquest. Wasn't that to be this morning?"

"We put it off coupla days. I got to have time. Can't do nothing all in a minute. The District Attorney, John Corson, says it's all right."

Krouse rose and followed Brock to the door, filling Mrs. Magruder's chaste hallway with the evil-smelling smoke of his corkscrew cigar.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Brock," Krouse said. "Have you got a pistol?"

"No, I haven't."

Krouse brought forth an automatic. "I been thinking maybe you need this," he went on. "And since that *bartich* note you got I'm sure of it. Better be on the safe side a'ready. If that fellow comes snooting around here you take a shot for him."

Brock looked at the weapon and stuck it in his pocket, aware that the affair was becoming more serious for him than he had expected.

"I won't let him get away next time," he muttered. Outside he told Krouse of his thought about the safety pin.

"That safety pin, Mr. Krouse—it was bent. Don't you think there ought to be somewhere a piece of the shirt collar it was torn out of?"

Krouse grinned and punched the self-starter of his muddy flivver.

"I forgot to tell you maybe the murderer wore a light blue collar with white streaks in it. Ha, ha. It

ain't good to tell everything you know all at once till you have to."

Brock could only grin faintly in reply. Cleverness such as this was hard to reconcile with Mr. Krouse's Weber-Fieldsian locutions.

"I meet you at the hotel, Northampton, one o'clock," cried Mr. Krouse, above the roar of the shivering flivver which departed up the road toward the Trudeau house, sputtering blue smoke and mud in all directions.

In half an hour the willing Brock was in Northampton. He parked the Magruder car alongside the curb of the Northampton Hotel and went in. There were only two hotels, for the county seat was a town of scarcely more than two thousand inhabitants, and transient visitors were few. The farmers who had business at the stores, the doctors' or at the courts usually drove to town in their own automobiles. And the two hotels were more than large enough to accommodate the drummers and casual visitors who came from a distance. Brock had an idea that this clue might yield something, an opinion obviously shared by Mr. Krouse. Brock chose the Northampton Hotel first because it was the larger, the place to which a stranger would be sent from the railroad station which was just around the corner.

Behind the desk a thin man with an Uncle Sam chin whisker was reading the morning newspaper. He was the proprietor and his name was Mehl. Brock described the Frenchman as well as he could and Mr. Mehl discarded his paper and stood up.

"A stranger—a Frenchy, about fifty, with blue eyes, gray-brown hair? Why—yes, Mr. Brock, two, three days ago."

The hotel register lay open on the desk and Brock glanced over it.

"Is this it—Georges Merillat?"

"That's him—"

"Did he have on a gray suit, soft black hat, a dark blue cravat, and patent leather shoes?"

"Yeah, that's the man. But he wasn't in yesterday."

"No. He wasn't in—he's dead."

"Dead? Have they found the body?"

"Yes. He's the man found murdered up at Laurel."

"My God! And I've just been reading about it. Merillat—"

"That's the man. No doubt of it. What do you know about him?"

"Nothing much. He didn't speak very good. He was only here since Thursday."

"What was he doing here?"

"I don't know. I made out he was going to look at some farming lands to buy. Nice enough fella, kinder hang-dog-down-in-the-mouth, now when I come to think of it."

"Did he have any visitors?"

"Not that I know of. Wait a minute." He went to the foot of the steps in the hall and yelled shrilly, "Tillie! Oh, Tillie! Come down here." And in a few moments a stout woman appeared on the steps, removing a towel that she had tied around her head. Mr. Mehl introduced her as Mrs. Mehl.

"Say, Tillie, what you know about the Frenchy, Merillat? In his room most of the time, wasn't he?"

"Until yesterday. He ain't been back."

Mr. Brock explained why and Mrs. Mehl showed immediate excitement. "Well, I declare," she gasped

at last. "Number 35, I had an idea something was queer about that fella."

"Anybody come here to see him?" Brock asked.

"He stayed in his room mostly. No, nobody came here to the hotel. He may have seen people outside. So he's dead! Well, pop, I guess we're out his board and lodging."

"Did he have any baggage?"

"A bag. I saw it in 35 this morning when Cora was cleaning up."

"I've got to look in it."

"Well," Mrs. Mehl said after a glance at the visitor, "I guess it's all right if Julius Krouse sent you."

They led the way up the stair and Brock followed until Mrs. Mehl took out a pass key and opened the door of Number 35. Everything was in order, the bed made, a gray overcoat on the clothes rack. A brush, comb, toothbrush, and a battered suitcase at the foot of the bed completed the signs of occupancy.

It was an old bag, rather battered, having several labels—which Brock noted for future reference—a sticker of one of the smaller steamers of the French Line, another of the American Express. He carried it to the table by the window and tried to open it, but the lock was fastened. So Mrs. Mehl got a screwdriver and they pried it open. Underwear, socks, collars, cravat, a time-table, a receipted bill of the Hotel Maupin in New York, and a packet of letters and papers tied with an old blue tape. Brock could not restrain a gasp of satisfaction as he eagerly took them out and examined them. They were all in French, some of them much soiled and rubbed from frequent reading.

others more recent in an ink that had lost no color. Mr. and Mrs. Mehl were peering over Brock's shoulder, so he carried a chair to the window with an air of deliberation.

"I'll be here for a while," he said suggestively. "I'll let you know if I want anything." And then, with an inspiration, added, "There was money in the dead man's clothes, I think I can promise that you'll get what he owed you."

They took the hint and went toward the door.

"By the way," Brock said, "you needn't let anybody know I'm here. And don't say anything about this Merillat being the dead man."

Mrs. Mehl nodded and shoved the reluctant chin whisker down the hallway in front of her. Brock closed the door and assured himself that there were no items of importance that he had overlooked anywhere else in the room. The pocket of the overcoat revealed a pair of French gloves bearing the mark of the *Bon Marché,* Paris, and nothing else.

He took up the letter that seemed to be the oldest. It was dated at Tours, March, 1922, and was written under the letterhead of a firm of lawyers, addressed to Pierre Duval, rue des Petits Souris, Paris, and was as follows:

DEAR SIR:

Through the agency of an old friend of yours, Madame Benoit of this city, we have at last succeeded in discovering an address which will possibly permit a letter to reach you. If you are the Pierre Duval who lived in Tours until 1890, and you will communicate with us at once you will

hear something greatly to your advantage. Having received positive assurance and proofs of your identity, the writer will call upon you and make the necessary arrangements.

I need not add that my firm has no connections or affiliations with the police and that all communications will be strictly confidential.

I am, monsieur, &c.
RAOUL BONTEMPS.

The mention of the French police created at once an intense interest and Brock found another letter dated the following month in the same year from Raoul Bontemps to Pierre Duval.

DEAR SIR:

I cannot find it in my heart to blame you for your prudence and am therefore addressing this communication, as you request, to the *Poste Restante,* since you have already taken the precaution to change your address. As you desire further information I will say that a client of ours, who must be nameless, is acting on behalf of one who once did you a wrong and is very anxious to make a proper restitution for all that you have suffered. Accordingly, when proper proofs of your identity are given to us a sum of money will be deposited monthly to your credit in a bank of Paris.

I hope I need not add a second time that our transactions will be strictly confidential. It must be obvious to you that had we been interested in

your past or your escape from prison we could have caused your arrest at your old address.

Awaiting your reply, I am, monsieur, &c.

RAOUL BONTEMPS.

The pot was stirring. Was Georges Merillat Pierre Duval? An escaped convict who feared the French police and had been in hiding in Paris? But what was he doing in Northampton? And where did Trudeau come into the story?

A third letter several months later was the next in sequence and referred to a satisfactory meeting and agreement that had taken place at Tours between Pierre Duval and Raoul Bontemps. The transaction, whatever it had been, was closed.

A fourth letter was written in a feminine hand, expressed in an argot of the provinces and was difficult to decipher. Briefly the writer expressed herself as sorry for the accidental part she had had in Duval's misfortunes. She wrote that she was very poor and sick and asked for money. It was signed "Jacqueline Benoit."

The letter that Duval sent in reply must have been a refusal, for the next letter of Madame Benoit to Duval contained a threat to expose him to the police if he did not comply with her request. The two letters revealed a former relationship between them but gave none of the clues that Brock was seeking.

Disappointed, he turned to the next letter, a typed communication from the cashier of a bank in Paris. It had been written two years later and referred to an overdraft of his account. Another letter from the cashier of the bank:

It is quite impossible for me to reveal the real identity of the person who sends these deposits to your account. We have referred to him as Monsieur Vibert. We have no hesitancy in informing you that that is not his name. It will be useless for you to inquire further of this bank. Otherwise at your service, monsieur, we are, &c. &c.

Brock was beginning to believe that his investigation was to yield him nothing when in turning over another letter from Jacqueline Benoit, his quick glance caught a name that seemed familiar to him—Bertrand Daumier. He stared at the name, his mind working rapidly. Daumier! Wasn't a man named Daumier one of Emile Trudeau's visitors? And if Brock's memory was not faulty, wasn't he also a brother-in-law of Squire McDermott's? Brock turned back to the first page and read the letter carefully. The phrases that rewarded his search were these:

I have not been idle. Monsieur Bontemps is a good advocate in his office and a very bad one on a fête day when there is much champagne to be drunk. My brother's child is very pretty and very discreet. She has succeeded in making Monsieur Raoul foolish about her. And one night he told her the truth. The real name of the miraculous Monsieur Vibert is Bertrand Daumier and he is an importer of silks in New York, America.

Voilà, I have told you. I have requited you for the harm I once had done you. And you too must repay me, for as you know I am not without weapons that I shall know how to use. The purse

of this Monsieur Bertrand Daumier is bottomless. You should therefore know how to make this information profitable to us both. It is quite possible that he is the very man you're looking for, though I cannot believe that he would act as he has done unless through a third person. You should go to New York. Perhaps then there will be enough for me and a little to help enlarge the *dot* of my little Celestine who will be wanting one day to get married. . . . Before you go—a thousand francs will keep me satisfied and comfortable.

Hurriedly Brock ran through the other letters. If he expected to find one in Trudeau's hand he was disappointed. There was nothing that seemed to bear directly upon the Trudeau case. Two typed letters from the Paris bank about Duval's account. An appealing letter from Madame Benoit finishing with the usual threat. A blackmailer, himself blackmailed!

Brock put the letters upon the table and took out his pipe and pouch, smoking for a moment furiously, while he tried to reconstruct the story of Pierre Duval. A crime somewhere in his background, perhaps years prior to the Bontemps letter in 1922. The thoughtless phrase of Jacqueline Benoit, Duval's mistress, that had led to his capture by the police. Prison, escape. And then the letters of this firm of lawyers which suddenly brought the escaped convict a gift of money from the man who had wronged him. Daumier was merely the agent. For the sentence— "It is quite possible that he is the man you're looking for," seemed to indicate clearly Madame Benoit's knowledge of the name of the

fountain of all this wealth that the useful Daumier dispensed through the Paris bank.

Was this unnamed man Emile Trudeau? That was the question. It seemed very likely. Daumier was Trudeau's friend—an old friend probably who had acted in his behalf with the firm of lawyers in Tours and later with the Paris bank. Daumier had been discreet. But all his defenses had fallen before the wheedling tongue of a pretty girl and an amorous French lawyer. Bontemps had told. Perhaps he had thought it didn't matter what he told since he had already received his fee. Georges Merillat, alias Pierre Duval (for his identity now seemed certain), had come to America and met Daumier and thus in some way discovered the address of Emile Trudeau who was the man he sought.

And the "wrong" that Trudeau had done to Duval—what was it? What wrong could Emile Trudeau have done to any one? And yet the story dovetailed so neatly. Trudeau's isolation. His dislike of people. His recent spells of irritation, nervousness, and apprehension. His anxiety to get his letters from the mail—Duval's letters about a sin of the past that had at last found Trudeau out. A sin that had found Trudeau out because his accusing conscience had turned his heart toward the sufferings of the man he had wronged. All this was like Trudeau, who had thought he could atone a fault of his past by doing good in secret, not knowing how much he risked by this belated generosity. The more Brock considered the matter the more definite the identity of Trudeau became.

He tried to make a picture of the incidents the night of the killing. . . . The visit, by arrangement, of this

Georges Merillat to the house of Emile Trudeau. The money produced, a quarrel over some detail in which Merillat drew his French revolver and shot at Trudeau who. . . .

And then suddenly the whole tissue of Brock's imagined story fell to pieces. For who was the man in the blue shirt who smoked cigarettes? How about Daumier? And with Trudeau traced to Reading, who was the man who had dropped the threatening note through the slate of the shutter, and had fled like a deer into the woods when Brock had gone after him? There was no answer. Brock knocked out his pipe and picked up the letters again. As Krouse had said—"kind of nutty—ain't it?"

CHAPTER VI

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

I

IT was half past twelve when Brock, having reread all the letters of Pierre Duval, word by word, in order to be sure that nothing important had escaped him, gathered them all together, tied them with blue tape, and put them in his pocket. The curious Mr. Mehl came to the door asking if there was anything that he could do. The man was eager to know the result of his investigation but Brock told him nothing except that he expected Mr. Krouse at any moment and asked that he be shown up as soon as he arrived.

Then Brock lighted another pipe, put his heels up on the radiator, and tried to get a new perspective of the situation. Out of the tale of the sordid Merillat as he had read it emerged the tragic and lonely figure of his friend, Emile Trudeau, who had been willing to pay a large sum of money to hide his secret, some disgraceful or even criminal act of the distant past. A vision of Judith Kennedy intruded here between Brock and his speculations as to what that act had been. It worried Brock that this evidence as to Trudeau's past should have been discovered through his own efforts and that the result of his efforts must bring pain to this girl.

The existence of a large sum of money in the house, if that could be definitely known, would be a strong point in Trudeau's favor, for it was inconceivable that

the Frenchman would bring this money to his house unless with the intention of applying it to some immediate purpose; and having asked Merillat to Castle Rock to pay him what he demanded, it was also inconceivable that Trudeau should kill the Frenchman, who, having accomplished the object of his visit, would be glad to get away with his gains. The letters were evidence of the object of Merillat's visit. They were evidence, too, of a reason for the retiring Frenchman's flight, because he knew that the sudden death of the visitor and the discovery of his body would mean an inquisition which, even if it acquitted him of this crime, would pitilessly expose him to other and quite as dreaded inquiries as to the past.

Brock's duty was, of course, clear. Krouse represented the District Attorney's office and the law. Brock would be obliged to turn these letters over to Krouse, and to tell him, if asked, what they revealed. But he had great hopes that Krouse would not be swerved from his original theory that the murder was probably done by the man who wore the gold safety pin. And he intended to suggest that the letters need not be used at the inquest except as a general confirmation of the blackmail theory, should they be needed.

Mr. Krouse arrived a few minutes before one, wearing the placid demeanor of a cat that has just eaten a canary. He had an air of accomplishment and listened to Brock's story, slightly detached, as though still enjoying pleasant reminiscences of his feast. The look of weariness had left him, and when Brock finished speaking he nodded his head sagely.

"Well, Mr. Brock, you done pretty good a'ready. We got some past history to fall back on. This man

Daumier will have something to say. We got to keep an eye on Daumier. I met up with him last summer once at the Laurel Mountain House. His sister is the wife of Squire McDermott."

He made no further comment, so Brock asked him how it affected his opinions about the crime.

Krouse gave Brock his craftiest smile as he rose. "If I told you that, you'd know as much as I do onct! Now you come along with me and we'll find out something about this here money."

The Farmers National Bank was on the next block and when they had explained their mission, they were shown into a cubicle—the inner sanctum, private office and board room.

Mr. Slosson, the cashier, showed the usual caution, but at last, when closely pressed by Mr. Krouse, admitted that Emile Trudeau had kept an account at the bank.

"We got to have all the cards on the table, Mr. Slosson," said Krouse. "You got your duty to Mr. Trudeau a'ready, but the law comes first. And I got to ask you what for kind of a man is Trudeau in money ways? He's pretty well fixed—ain't? What you know about him?"

Mr. Slosson stroked his chin dubiously but at last admitted in plain terms that Emile Trudeau was very rich.

"Kept a big balance, yet?"

"No. Not a big balance. He didn't seem to need much money for himself. But we paid him interest on anything over a thousand dollars of deposits."

"H-m. And he didn't ever have a big sum of money here?"

"No. Not usually. But he had resources. Investments in New York, stocks and bonds in his safe deposit box."

"Um. . . . Did he, now, ask you in the last week or so to provide for him a large sum in cash?"

The backbone of Mr. Slosson's resistance was already broken and at the question he brought out some cigars.

"Well, Mr. Krouse, I guess I better tell you. Since I heard about the murder up at Castle Rock I been thinking I ought to go to the Court House and tell what I know." He lighted his cigar and sat back in his chair. "I'll say I'm surprised to see you because from all accounts of the crime, there didn't seem to be any signs of money involved."

"Except these here, maybe," and Krouse laid upon the table the slips of paper he had found. "Money straps, ain't?"

"Yes, they're probably ours. But I'm willing to tell you all I know. Two weeks ago Mr. Trudeau came in here and asked me to have twenty thousand dollars in cash for him so that he could get it by the seventeenth —that was last Friday. He produced from his safe deposit box negotiable securities for a trifle more than that amount."

"And you said you'd leave him have it?"

Mr. Slosson nodded.

"It was an unusual sum of money to pass over the counter when a certified check would do as well. So unusual that I got new money from the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia and made a note of the serial numbers."

Krouse's long face broke into wide longitudinal

wrinkles. "Well, that's about the best news I've heard, now, in weeks, Mr. Slosson. You ain't cashier of a big bank for nothing, ain't."

"Well, it didn't cost anything and I was a little worried. You see we don't pass that much cash over the counter once in a lifetime here in Northampton."

"Well, that's fine! And Mr. Trudeau came here to get this here money on last Friday?"

"Yes."

"Anybody with him?"

"No. That is—he came in the bank by himself."

"Drove down, didn't he?"

"I guess so."

"Trudeau didn't drive a car, did he, Mr. Brock?" Krouse asked.

"I think perhaps Johnson—"

"Was the colored man Johnson outside in the Ford?"

"I don't know. Wait a minute." Mr. Slosson went to the door of the cages, back of the gratings. "Say, Ab! Did you take notice whether Trudeau's colored man Johnson was outside in the machine when Trudeau came in for his money, Friday?"

"I don't remember—" came the dubious reply. Followed by the immediate assurance. "Yes, sir, he was. I remember now. I could see him through the window from here." Mr. Krouse had risen and followed the cashier to the door.

"Let me see, once," he said, and pushed past Mr. Slosson into the teller's cage. "Nice big window you got," and then, "where was the Ford?" he asked of the man called Ab.

"Right by the curb, there."

"Would you mind opening the brass window, mister?"

Ab glanced at the cashier for consent and complied. Mr. Krouse stuck his head out of the window and peered around toward the street.

"Is this the window you passed the money through a'ready?"

"Yes."

"What made you notice Johnson, mister?"

"Well it was a pretty large sum of money—"

"Do you think Johnson saw you now, pass over the money from where he sat?"

"He couldn't have helped it, if he'd looked."

"Well, did he look?"

"I couldn't tell you that."

"Were there any other people in the bank?"

"I don't—yes, George Reifsnyder of the Laurel Mountain House was here cashing a check."

"Ah."

"I remember—because he asked me what the old hermit was doing away from his cave."

"Reifsnyder! Any one else?"

"I don't think so."

Mr. Krouse gazed once more at the window and turned slowly back into the private office.

"I guess that's all, Mr. Slosson," he said.

2

Krouse and Brock walked down the street toward the Court House. Suddenly Krouse stopped at the door of a men's furnishing store. "I wonder what kind of shirts this fella's got," he said.

They were waited on by a young man with pomaded

hair, and a sophisticated manner. Krouse produced a piece of tissue paper from his pocket and carefully unfolded it, disclosing a very small fragment of raveled goods.

"You got any, now, shirts to match this here piece?" he asked.

The young man took the fragment between thumb and forefinger, examing it carefully.

"Looks like linen and silk," he said. "We don't carry a big line of fine goods. I'll show you what we've got, though." And with this he pulled from his shelves two or three boxes, displaying their contents. None of the shirts that he showed were similar in design or texture to the sample and when the colored shirts of cotton were exhibited it was immediately observed that the sample of Mr. Krouse's had nothing in common with any other goods in the store.

"You won't find any shirts like that in Northampton or anywhere around here," said the young man. "Reading, maybe. More likely New York or Philadelphia."

"Much obliged," replied Krouse with a grin. And wrapping the precious fragment again in its tissue paper, he led the way out of the store.

"I told you, once, our fella was toney," he said to Brock. "Now maybe we go back to Magruder's and see what we can do about these here footprints. You go on back, I got to stop at the hotel and take this Frenchy's things to the Court House and see the District Attorney."

That was a busy afternoon. Mr. Krouse still wore his cat and canary smile but Brock's curiosity as to his morning's work at Castle Rock was not gratified.

For at every leading question Mr. Krouse put on his wise look and repeated his remark—"if I told you that, you know as much as I do a'ready."

The lawn at Mrs. Magruder's showed traces of footprints but the grass which was tough in texture had prevented the formation of a very definite outline. The indentations of the toes were deeply marked, bearing out Brock's tale that the intruder had run away from the house rapidly as Brock had come out on the portico. The softer ground near the fence had preserved the impressions closely. The shoes that the man wore were not square-toed like most of those worn by the farmers or laboring men of the community. The footprints had been made by shoes rather pointed than rounded at the toes, a fairly new pair of shoes with rubber heels.

"Here is where he stopped behind this here tree when you ran out looking for him a'ready," said Krouse leaning forward eagerly. The marks were very distinct, for the surface of the ground, denuded of grass, had presented a fairly firm surface. Had he trodden on wax the impression of the shoes of the man could not have been more definite. "He'd weigh about a hundred and seventy maybe," Krouse announced. "And he wears about a number nine, medium width. That makes him, say, five feet nine or ten—"

"High arches. He's young, Mr. Krouse."

"Yah. He can run one hundred yards in wet ground while you come from the dining room through the door to the side of the house. You take out your watch, once, and tell me how long it took before you got around here."

Brock obeyed, timing his actions as closely as he

could—four seconds of curiosity, two of indecision, two more to reach the front door, five to run down the steps and around the house.

"About thirteen seconds Mr. Krouse," Brock replied, rather astounded at the revelation.

"Yah. I knew by the deep marks of the toes he wasn't wasting no time."

He followed Krouse to the wooden three-rail fence, which Krouse inspected closely. There was a smear of mud on it, where a foot had touched. Krouse climbed the next panel and stood on the other side.

"This fella waited for you behind that there tree quite some time, Mr. Brock. Maybe he hoped you'd follow him out here under the tree where it was dark. He's pretty desperate, looks like—I guess you're right. He thinks you know more about that murder than you do. Ain't?"

"How do you get that?"

"Well he didn't go away in any hurry. He took his time getting over this fence yet. You see how he picks his way slow along, until he comes to the other fence to the pike. There's heel marks. I think we bring plaster of Paris to-morrow, Mr. Brock, before some of these *dumm* Dutchies walk around here a'ready."

The little man brought out two of his queer cigars, offering one to his companion. But Brock took out his pipe. It seemed that a moment of retrospection had arrived. Brock had learned that questions only made the little man silent and elusive. So he sat on the fence, stuffing his pipe and looking off toward Castle Rock. Mr. Krouse puffed vigorously for a moment, and then at last Brock's patience was rewarded.

"Us, we're getting warmer, Mr. Brock. But we got to get warmer yet. I ain't got no doubts yet Old Trudeau didn't kill that Frenchy Merillat. Mind, if I hadn't found evidence another fella was in the fight, things would look bad for Trudeau a'ready. This Frenchy had something on him. Trudeau was ready to pay blackmail to keep him quiet. They might of had a quarrel and Merillat might of attacked Trudeau. But if Trudeau hadn't run away, he'd only got to show the bullet hole of the Frenchy's pistol and the pistol itself to prove he killed the fella in self-defense. Where's that pistol, Mr. Brock? Who's got it? Did Trudeau take it away with him? I been looking everywhere for it. I found out a whole lot of things but I didn't find no pistol. Trudeau ran away, not because he killed Merillat, but because he had something else to hide. He didn't know you'd find those letters at the hotel. Maybe there was, now, other reasons for why he had to go away. If this here other toney fella killed the Frenchy, Trudeau saw him do it. This toney fella might of made Trudeau go away so he wouldn't testify against him, a'ready. Trudeau was scared of this fella too—more scared than he was of Merillat. Maybe the toney fella found out all about both of them. Maybe it's not Trudeau who took the money but this fella who came to Trudeau's house when he wasn't invited to come. Maybe he was in the house a'ready when Merillat came for his money—"

"You believe that," Brock broke in.

Krouse nodded. "Somebody was hiding in those there bushes near the kitchen door. You can't make nothing of the footprints, since those *dumm* Dutchies from Laurel came snooping around a'ready—walking

over everywheres. If it wasn't Merillat it was this toney fella. What was he doing there?"

"You *are* geting warmer, Mr. Krouse."

"Not hot yet. But I got some lines out maybe to land this toney fish." Krouse knocked the ash from his corkscrew cigar against the fence rail. "Say, I got to find a fella five feet nine or ten, fancy dresser, with shirts of silk and linen and nice shoes, from New York or Philadelphia, maybe, with rubber heels. Age—between twenty-five and thirty-five years. Weight around a hundred and seventy. Smokes American cigarettes, has blond curly hair and a split in his thumb—"

Krouse was leaning against the fence, his arms folded, looking into the distance toward Castle Rock, thinking of the items that he enumerated. If he had not been so absorbed in his thoughts he would have seen the slight start that his companion made, the sudden wide distention of the pupils of Brock's eyes and the quick furtive motion of his right hand to his pocket. For Brock was so bewildered that he almost toppled down from his seat on the fence rail. In his right-hand coat pocket, his forefinger nervously rubbed the ball of his thumb on which he would carry to his grave—the mark of a German machine-gun bullet. If Mr. Krouse had said that the hair of the murderer was brown instead of blond and curly Brock could almost have imagined that he himself had been the murderer. It was a remarkable coincidence and as a moment passed he regained assurance from his own knowledge that he had not been at Trudeau's since the previous Thursday.

"Blond and curly. . . . How did you find that out, Mr. Krouse?"

"Three hairs between the Frenchy's fingers a'ready. There was a fight—ain't?"

Brock nodded. And then with composure, "And where did you take the thumb print?" he asked.

"On the table, and on the book on the shelf."

"The thumb prints were different?"

"Yah. The one on the table didn't have no split."

"Blood marks?"

"Not on the book. That was in some stuff like mucilage that somebody spilled."

"There were two other men in the room—You're sure?" Brock asked.

"I told you that once, a'ready," said Krouse dryly.

Brock was silent, startled as he had been twice before by the strange chain of circumstances that seemed to be weaving about him, connecting him so obviously with the crime. Brock's old inferiority complex stalked him again. Perhaps his weeks of insomnia and of nervous tension had robbed him of some of his resiliency, his skill at analysis, his power of concentration. . . . No. He was quite sane, quite reasonable. The mark of the split thumb *was only on the book* which had been brought from the Magruder house with an express purpose. . . . The message thrust through the slats of the shutters had been dropped by a desperate man who feared Brock's friendship with Trudeau and sought to connect him with the crime. These were reasonable explanations. Explanations that would surely satisfy Krouse. Yet Brock did not make them. He wanted to think over the incidents and use them in his own way.

The dry, commonplace tones of Mr. Krouse brought him back to their discussion.

"We got to find where that there money's gone, Mr. Brock. For the fella that took that money killed the Frenchy, Merillat. It ain't going to be easy, but I got some ideas. Money don't ever stay long in the dark. And we can identify it. I got those wisitors to Trudeau last week summoned for the inquest. Dr. Wylie, Squire McDermott and his boy Archie, the Mallorys and this here Daumier. Maybe we find something a'ready." He climbed back over the fence into Mrs. Magruder's place and led the way slowly across the lawn to his flivver.

CHAPTER VII

SNIPING

AUNT Julia, who had watched the examination of the premises from a window upstairs, was, of course, keenly curious to find out why Mr. Krouse walked all over the lawn and examined so carefully the ground behind her beech tree. So Brock was obliged to tell her of the midnight visitor. He did not tell her of the message he had received and explained in answer to her persistent questions that he had merely heard a noise outside during the night and had gone out while she was asleep to try to find out who was there. It wasn't perhaps a matter of any great importance, he said, but he had thought it wise on account of his friendship with Trudeau and his connection with the case to tell Mr. Krouse about it.

His statement seemed to appease her curiosity but not her doubts.

"I tell you Joe, I don't like the way you're taking a hand in this affair. You think you're all right, but a man who's only had twenty hours' sleep in two weeks hasn't any business getting excited the way you are. You were sent up here for a rest, and I wouldn't be able to look your mother in the face in Kingdom Come if I don't look after you now. I'm just going to tell this Krouse man to attend to his own business and not come throwing his filthy stogy ashes all over my nice carpet."

Brock put his arm around her neck and kissed her wrinkled brow.

"Why, I'm fit as a fiddle, Aunt Julia. Slept seven hours last night. Didn't you have to call me? Now don't you bother. I'm doing what I can to help Julius Krouse, because I don't want Emile Trudeau to be accused of a crime he didn't commit, and because Krouse is one of the wisest gazaboes that ever came out of musical comedy."

She laughed. "He *is funny*—more like one of those old-fashioned cigar-store Indians though and he looks to me just about as dumb. What makes you think he's wise?"

"He's just a natural born detective. Maybe it's just his plain Dutch curiosity raised to the power of genius. I thought I knew something about intuition, about the use of negligible details in police investigations, about analysis and deduction but this cigar-store Indian as you call him, has the whole New York detective bureau backed off of the map. He's positively uncanny, I tell you."

"And he doesn't believe that Emile Trudeau killed the man?"

"No. He has reasons for not believing so. I'm glad for Trudeau's sake—and for Judith Kennedy's."

Mrs. Magruder's knitting needles clicked comfortably.

"Seems to me, Joe," she ventured, "your interest might be more on Judith's account than Trudeau's."

"Nonsense! Isn't it natural for anybody to be sorry for a girl placed in the position she's in?"

"Besides being a pretty girl, of course. You've noticed that she's very intelligent!"

"I haven't had much chance to notice anything. I only know that she's a nice kid, that she's very fond of her uncle and that it looks as if she was up against it."

"But if you say Trudeau didn't kill the man—"

"Well, he's gone and he's under a cloud. There's a lot of stuff that may come out at the inquest that won't be very pleasant for her."

"You mean about Trudeau's past. There!" She sniffed triumphantly. "I knew there was some reason why Emile Trudeau was so offish with people. What about him, Joe? Is he a murderer, a spy, or just a counterfeiter?"

Her nephew laughed. "Well, I don't know everything, but I've got some ideas a'ready, as Krouse would say. And you don't stop me from being sorry for Miss Kennedy."

"I don't want you to stop being sorry for her. She's one of the nicest girls I know. And I'm not the only one that thinks so," she added significantly.

"Oh, I suppose she has a lot of admirers," he said carelessly. "She ought to have."

Mrs. Magruder laughed.

"Maybe you came along too late, Joe."

He looked out of the window at the clearing west.

She smiled at the back of his head.

"There's Billy Mallory and Archie McDermott. Some said she was engaged to Archie last summer."

"Well, that's none of my business."

"I just thought I'd warn you, Joe. When a man brags about being a woman hater the way you do, he's just about ready to fall in love with the first petticoat that comes along."

"I'm not in love with Miss Kennedy," he said with

dignity, "and I'm going up to Hawleys' now to give her some advice about her testimony at the inquest."

"Well, Joe," Mrs. Magruder returned, "give her my love and tell her if she wants to make a change for a while my spare room is ready for her. I'll be going up there calling myself to-morrow. By the way, did you know I'd been summoned to the inquest, too?"

"No. I suppose it's just because they think as a neighbor you might know something."

"Well, I don't. But of course I'll go."

This conversation with Mrs. Magruder had been slightly annoying. She was one of the most practical creatures in her own affairs with that weakness of her qualities, an incurable tendency to see the romantic in others. It was rather far-fetched, this trying to believe he was smitten with a girl he had only seen twice in his life. It was the provincial attitude. Any one had a right to be sorry for Judith Kennedy. He didn't remember having met Billy Mallory but somebody had introduced him to Archie McDermott at the Post Office and he seemed a good enough sort of fellow. But it wasn't any of Brock's affair if she was engaged to McDermott or Mallory or both of them for that matter.

As he walked toward the village he began turning over in his mind how far it would be wise for him to go in preparing Miss Kennedy for the revelations of the mystery of Emile Trudeau's life. If he told her that the District Attorney's office had found definite evidence of the presence of another man who was suspected of the crime she might be willing to talk more freely of Emile Trudeau's past.

As good fortune would have it, when he turned from

the highway into the crossroad leading to the Hawleys' house he met Miss Kennedy carrying a suitcase. She said that she was taking some things to Castle Rock where she was going to give some instructions to the colored man Johnson. He asked permission to accompany her and took the bag from her hand. She was still rather pallid, he thought, more pallid perhaps because of the purple shadows around her eyes, for the air and exercise had brought a delicate touch of color into her cheeks.

"I was hoping I would see you again," he said, "because some other things have turned up that I thought you might want to know."

"I did want to see you," she said. "I was so afraid you might think I didn't appreciate your interest."

"My aunt, Mrs. Magruder, asked me to tell you that her spare bedroom is waiting for you. She is coming to see you to-morrow."

"She's very kind. Things are so unsettled in my mind. I don't know yet just what to do. I don't feel like staying at Castle Rock all alone."

"Of course that's impossible," he said. "But I hope that in a little while this situation will be cleared up, so you'll know what to do."

"If Uncle Emile would only write, tell me something to reassure me. Do you suppose he will, Mr. Brock?"

He shook his head. "I don't know. I suppose he might be afraid that his letters would be intercepted."

"Oh!" she gasped. "That explains something. A letter forwarded to me from Bryn Mawr looked as though it had been tampered with at the Post Office. What right have they to do that? It makes me feel

as though they suspected *me* of complicity in this terrible affair."

Brock frowned. It was quite like Mr. Julius Krouse to go to this extreme in searching for evidence.

"It's very humiliating," he said. "You could do something about it, probably, but if the letters are innocent, it's hardly worth while."

"Innocent!" she said with a laugh. "Well, rather. This one was from my roommate at college telling me that I'd taken away her toothbrush by mistake. If Mr. Krouse can make me *particeps criminis* with that information he's welcome to it."

She was trying very hard to regain her courage and her spirits. It seemed very difficult after that for him to speak of Emile Trudeau's past. So he told her first of his conversations with Mr. Krouse about the clues that had been found, and the convictions of the little man as to the criminal. He did not tell her of the message he had received the night before, for this was Krouse's secret and his own and would, of course, only mystify her as it had mystified him. But he thought it wise at last to tell her something of his discoveries at the Northampton Hotel, giving none of the details of the letters, but letting her know in a general way that Mr. Trudeau was the victim of a blackmail plot that had to do with something in the distant past.

"Blackmail! Why?" she gasped.

"I don't know. Nobody can ever tell us that but Emile Trudeau himself—or possibly Bertrand Daumier."

"Daumier!"

"You know him?"

"Yes. My uncle has known him always. In New York before he moved to Laurel—"

"He has been summoned to appear before the coroner's jury," Brock added.

"Have you any reason to believe that Mr. Daumier knows something of this plot to—to blackmail my uncle?"

"Yes, Miss Kennedy, I have," he muttered.

"You mean by all this, that something—something discreditable may be found out about my uncle—?"

"I didn't say so," Brock said gently. "I don't know of anything discreditable. Neither does Krouse. What I do know is that your uncle yielded to a demand for blackmail from the Frenchman who was killed, for there was a large sum of money in the house on the night of the murder."

"Money—!" she gasped almost in a whisper.

"Twenty thousand dollars. He drew it from the bank in Northampton last Friday. The money has disappeared."

"Who took it—since the man it was brought for is dead . . . ?"

"That's the question. Your uncle or some one else. There was another man in your uncle's library that night."

"That poor old man! The leeches! They had come to bleed him. Oh, if I'd only taken the morning train, as I'd planned! They wouldn't have dared. And this dead man—I'm glad he's dead."

She stopped and turned eagerly toward Brock. "But Uncle Emile didn't kill him. Why should he have brought the money to pay the man if he intended killing him instead? If he wanted the man out of the way

is it reasonable to think he'd lure him to Castle Rock and send for me at the same time? Don't you see how absurd that is, Mr. Brock?"

"Yes. And that sort of an argument will be impressive with the jury." And then— "Did you know of any one else who might have been in correspondence with your uncle or whose presence had worried him— a younger man then this Frenchman?"

"No. No one. As you know he rarely went off the place. Billy Mallory was up here, Johnson says—and his father too—but of course that was on business about the hay."

The conversation came to a pause, perhaps for lack of immediate material, for they had entered the drive and approached the kitchen porch.

"Will you wait for me, Mr. Brock? Or do you have to go on? I'll only be here a few minutes."

Brock took out his pipe and waited in the driveway.

The body of the Frenchman, he knew, had been removed to an undertaking establishment and only the colored man Johnson remained at Castle Rock during the day. He had been given permission to go to the house of a friend in Laurel to sleep at night. Though the weather had cleared and the sun shone brightly, the square pile of masonry seemed more forbidding to Brock than on the morning two days ago when he had suffered such depression at the sight of it in the gloom of a rainy day. The tops of the fir trees nodded solemnly to him in the breeze while from the chicken yard came the cackle of a hen that had laid a belated egg, followed immediately by the self-applause of a rooster in vicarious triumph. Brock reminded himself that no matter what the tragedies of the world, new

eggs would be laid, hens would cackle and roosters crow.

He was about to stroll down the driveway to examine the exterior of the building under the window of the library when he heard a sound from behind the lattice that protected the kitchen porch. He glanced around and the black head of Thomas Jefferson Johnson protruded, it's eyes rolling.

"Hist!"

Brock turned and approached him. He was still dubious about this man. Krouse's questions of the cashier and paying teller at the Farmers Bank indicated a wish to find out if Johnson knew that the money was in the house. Brock remembered that Krouse wasn't altogether satisfied about the soundness of Johnson's slumbers on the night of the murder. He recalled too the curious question about the buttoned shoes and remembered the tiny beads of perspiration during the preliminary examination. Nor could Brock forget the strange way Johnson's bloodshot eyes had followed him about on the morning of the discovery of the murder.

"You want to speak to me?" Brock asked.

"Yassir. Miss Judith's upstairs in her room. I don't want her to hear."

"Is it anything important?"

"It's about dis yer Mr. Krouse. He been asking me a lot of fool questions, like he thought I know all about who kill dat man."

"Well, that's his job, Johnson. If you don't know anything about it, you ought to be able to prove it before the jury."

"I doan like de way dis yer Mr. Krouse treat me—makin' Officer Coales watch me en all. What right he

got to go up in my room in de attic en poke aroun' in my closet en bureau drawers?"

"If you're innocent you haven't got anything to be scared of."

"Innocent! My Gawd. *You* ought to know!"

The words seemed to have burst from the colored man in spite of himself. His eyes stared with a strange intensity until Brock twisted toward him, frowning.

"What the hell do you mean?" he growled.

Johnson's gaze dropped and fell away. He shuffled his feet and moved his shoulders nervously.

"I—I mean jes dat—I been round here a long while an' nobody ever suspicioned me 'bout nothin'."

"Oh!"

"I done tell de truth, so help me Gawd."

"Well, tell it to the jury," said Brock dryly.

The man glanced over his shoulder toward the door behind him and then leaned forward, his eyes popping.

"En you—" he asked, "you gwine tell dat jury all you knows?"

"Yes, I am," said Brock shortly.

There was a curious quality of tenseness in Johnson's voice and in his manner, unwarranted by the nature of his questions. The man had been frightened by Krouse, of course, and he was still frightened at the possibilities that lay before him at the inquest. But no man, whose conscience was clear, need give such signs of anxiety.

"I'm going to tell all I know," Brock repeated quietly. "And I'd advise you, Johnson, to do the same."

The colored man turned one more startled look at Brock as though about to speak again and then faced

quickly about, for Miss Kennedy had come out of the kitchen, with her bag ready to go back toward the village. Brock took the suitcase from her hand while she gave some parting instructions to the colored man.

"I've been terribly disturbed by what you've been telling me, Mr. Brock," she said as they went out of the gate.

"I thought I ought to tell you," he said quietly, "to prepare you for what may follow."

They crossed the road. There was a large stone on the edge of the meadow beyond.

"Let's sit here for a moment, Mr. Brock. I want you to tell me all that you know. I feel somehow as though I had the right to ask it of you." Brock sat beside her gravely.

"These letters—that you read," she went on timidly. "Did they indicate that my uncle Emile had been guilty of—of a crime?"

"No. There was no mention of a crime. But the inference was—"

"But this twenty thousand dollars might have been in payment of an old debt," she broke in, "or a gift to this man in recognition of some previous service."

"No, Miss Kennedy, it was no gift in the sense that you mean. It seemed to me like this. Something happened many years ago—a wrong that your uncle did to this man. Then later his conscience seemed to trouble him and he tried to make restitution. If he hadn't done so none of this would have happened. It was his kindness, a belated sense of his fault—whatever it was—that put this Frenchman upon his track."

"Then you're sure that this man who was killed

knew some secret and my uncle was willing to pay to keep the man silent—"

"I'm afraid so." Brock bent toward his companion eagerly. "I feel like a brute making you unhappy this way. I think it hurts me more than you suppose. I wish I could tell you that the whole thing is a fantastic mistake—that your uncle is the victim of a delusion and that the evidence as to his past is built on falsehood. But I can't. The letters I read were too sordid and too real to leave any doubt."

It seemed that she was past the point of tears and that their sources were dry. For she sat in silence looking down the meadow toward the woods as though impelled by the force of a new resolution.

"Can you forgive me for speaking the truth?" he asked quietly after a moment.

She flashed a bright glance up at him and laid her fingers impulsively over his.

"Yes, I can—I do—because you're kind."

"I hope you'll let me help you if you get too bewildered by what has happened to you. Whatever Emile Trudeau did in the past, he has suffered for it."

"Yes. He suffered. I realize it now. For years he has been the prey of melancholy and regret." She straightened and rose. "I don't care what he's done," she said deliberately. "Any sin can be atoned. I can only think of him as he was to me—the kindest and best of men—always."

Brock took up the bag. She was honest. She knew nothing more, cared nothing more than this.

"I admire you for your loyalty. It does him credit as well as you." He matched his steps to hers. "Come," he said, with an accent of encouragement.

"Let's hope that everything will turn out for the best. I've been helping Mr. Krouse in this investigation, because I've never believed Emile Trudeau committed this crime. I'd like to help you too. What I advise is perfect frankness. Any testimony that you give about your uncle's apprehensions should be helpful to him instead of damaging. The fact that he was threatened with blackmail is a valuable one in the cause of his innocence. And after all that's the only thing that matters at the inquest."

"Yes, that's true. I must tell what I know."

"And won't you call on me if I can do anything for you? I hope you believe I mean all that."

"I do," she said gently. And then with a smile, "I'm afraid I've taken you out of your way."

"Not so much out of my way after all," he said with a grin. "For you see I was on my way to the Hawleys' when I met you."

"Perhaps it isn't too late for you to come in now," she said as they drew near the house.

But he told her that he had promised his aunt to return for supper and left her, rewarded by a last warm flash of friendliness from her eyes.

There were many things to think about and Brock had always found that he did his best thinking when he was afoot. He was aware that during the past few weeks, his lonely walks had not been very fruitful; and even since the beginning of this investigation which had come as a relief to the monotony of his constant failures with the new book, he had not contributed much of real value to the constructive work of Mr. Julius Krouse. He felt rather humiliated that he, a

writer of mystery stories, with an experience of four or five years in association with the police of New York, had been relegated into the background by a little clerk in the office of the District Attorney of a minor county of Pennsylvania. What was the matter with him? Nothing apparently as to his body, for he was feeling better than he had felt for weeks, sleeping better, eating more, and during the past two days giving every encouraging sign of being well on the way to recovery.

But there were many things about the Trudeau mystery that he could not understand. Every day something happened that completely baffled his intelligence. What, for instance, when Brock had spoken of Johnson's innocence, did the colored man mean when he had said so feelingly—"My Gawd, *you* ought to know?" The phrase had been wrenched from him in an unguarded moment. And though the negro had explained his remark in the next breath it suggested more clearly than ever that Johnson had something to fear—and that he thought he might fear it from Brock. It also suggested the thought that Brock had had earlier in the day when Krouse had produced the evidence of the thumb print on the book—that the murderer was trying to "frame" Brock in connection with the murder. That thought was so absurd that it continued to amuse him—for nobody with an alibi like Brock's had anything to fear.

Though the idea amused him he was not without a sense of the precarious influences working about him.

According to his custom on fair nights, after supper, he went out for a walk in the air before going to bed. He thought of his own story no more, for that seemed

a thing of the past. He thought, instead, of the extraordinary intuitions of the Weber-Fieldsian Mr. Krouse. He knew that while the little man had taken him into his confidence up to a certain point, there were many lines of investigation which he proposed to travel alone. As Krouse frequently said, "he had some ideas a'ready." What he was doing to-night, Brock could not guess. A search, perhaps, for the shirt that tiny piece of material had come from; an investigation of the shoes of the entire population of Laurel and perhaps of Northampton; a hunt for note paper; a search for companions of Merillat.

Brock conceived suddenly the idea of a series of advertisements in the local daily paper of Northampton seeking possible information from persons who had seen Merillat in the streets of the town. For the Frenchman, a stranger, would surely have been noticed and if he had had companions between Thursday and Monday he must have been seen by somebody. The slightest information might lead to a useful clue.

Then, too, Brock thought of suggesting to Krouse a series of personals in the newspapers of New York and Philadelphia intended for the eyes of Emile Trudeau alone, stating that the letters of Duval had been discovered and that if Trudeau would return, he would be shown every consideration and clemency. Good ideas, not new in police history but always—

Brock's train of thought was broken abruptly. He had been walking the road on the way to Laurel woods, for it had not occurred to him that it was necessary for him to change his habits. The road was lonely, but so familiar to him that he felt quite at home there even

in the dark of the moon. But suddenly he stopped and listened, for he fancied he had heard sounds of footsteps in the shadows behind him. But there was nothing to be seen, though his eyes were quite accustomed to the gloom. He waited a moment watching and listening intently, comforted by the automatic in his outside coat pocket. Then instead of going on he turned back toward home peering to right and left at the shrubbery and trees. At a point where a great oak tree shadowed the sky, there was a startling flash of light to his right and a bullet clipped the bushes beside him.

Brock dropped instinctively as he had been taught to do in France, drawing his automatic. Perhaps five seconds passed. The time seemed much longer. Then something moved behind the trunk of the oak tree and emerged. Taking quick aim he fired now, scrambling to his feet and hunting cover. Strain his eyes as he would he could see nothing, but he thought he heard the soft pad of footsteps running across the field. But he could not be certain, so he crawled along in a ditch by the road side and crossed the road further down, emerging into the field where the man had been. Behind a tree he waited for a moment before coming out into the open. Then far to his left he saw a figure running over a hillock outlined against the sky, a figure that had disappeared by the time he had crossed the field. It was a risky business. Beyond the fence the meadow fell away into a tangle of trees and shrubbery. It seemed like suicide to go on, a plain mark against the sky for another ambush. So Brock lay flat listening. Silence. The faint sounds of rustling among the bushes, a tinkle of water in a stream somewhere, the

complaint of an owl. Night had thrown its hush over the brief excitement.

At last Brock rose and went back toward the road, stopping from time to time to be sure that he was not followed. The incident, it seemed, was closed.

CHAPTER VIII

THE INQUEST

MR. KROUSE'S comment the next morning on this affair was characteristic.

"For why didn't you lie still longer till he got nearer a'ready? Then you could of shot him easy."

"Yes, and maybe he'd have shot me."

"Serve you right for walking at night, looking at the moon when this fella's waiting around for to kill you."

"Well, he meant business all right."

"Yah. It's the fella that wrote the message a'ready. We been two fools, you and me. We'd of got this fella now if we'd had any sense once."

Brock questioned stupidly.

"We'd ought to have used you for bait," said Krouse in a disgusted tone. "You can't catch no fish without bait. I'd ought to sent you walking around while me and policeman Coales followed after you. *Dumme esel!*"

The idea was not without merit, and quite practical. But to Brock the suggestion of masquerading as the bait for so hungry a fish seemed less disinterested than it sounded.

"Well, there's no use worrying about that now. I've lost my chance again."

In the waking hours of the night Brock had thought again of his interview with Johnson and of the startled

look on the colored man's face when Brock had said that he was going to tell all he knew at the inquest. Could this night attack upon him have been in any way connected with his talk with Johnson? Perhaps, for the colored man was not beyond suspicion. And yet he had not seen or talked to Johnson prior to the midnight message of warning the night before. And it seemed quite clear that the warning had been given and the attack made by the same person. For a moment he thought of telling Krouse of the visit to Castle Rock yesterday afternoon and then decided to keep silence. So Krouse's next question startled him.

"What was Johnson talking to you about yesterday afternoon a'ready?"

Brock must have shown his uncertainty.

"You were there?" he asked.

"Yah. I went walking."

"Well," Brock said, "nothing much. He wanted to know if I was going to testify at the inquest."

"M-m. What for kind of a question is that? And you told him—?"

"I said that I was."

"Is that all?"

"Yes. I was only there a few minutes with Miss Kennedy. And then we came away."

"Miss Kennedy is a pretty girl. Ain't?"

Whatever the man had in his mind, the conversation created an unpleasant impression on Brock that he was being watched by Julius Krouse. He did not like the sensation. He had nothing to hide—that is nothing but this embarrassing reiteration of the suggestion that he knew more about the crime than he did, which constantly annoyed and perplexed him. He hadn't been

able to see why he should make the case more complicated for Krouse by injecting this absurd element, which would only continue to puzzle the little man as it did himself.

And somehow Krouse's spying and the nature of his questions seemed to make at once a difference in the frankness of their relations. The man's last remark about Miss Kennedy was nothing less than a suggestion that perhaps Brock's interest in that young lady showed a partiality that might be prejudicial to the ends of justice.

"Come, Mr. Brock," said Krouse looking at his watch, "we better maybe be getting to the inquest, once."

Krouse drove the flivver in silence—at least Krouse was silent if the flivver was not—looking, now, more like a cigar-store Indian than a Weber-Fieldsian comedian. Nor had Brock anything to say, for it seemed to him that the dangers he had run the night before merited something more agreeable from his companion than criticism and unworthy suspicion. He was beginning to see the hard texture that lay under the unpretentious and commonplace exterior of the little man. His was not a personality to be laughed at, one rather to be respected and perhaps dreaded a little.

They drove into the yard of the schoolhouse where a number of automobiles had already been parked.

They got out of the flivver in silence and entered the old frame schoolhouse which stood beside the more pretentious building of brick that had been recently built to accommodate the increasing number of children of the town. The room filled rapidly and two state

policemen were kept busy barring the merely curious until the jury, the legal representatives of the county, and all the witnesses were given place. The Castle Rock mystery, it seemed, had become a celebrated case, for the press agencies had asked for seats and even one New York paper which specialized in murder had sent its own reporter and photographer. The coroner, Dr. Burlingame, massive and important, took the seat at the teacher's desk. Near him was a young man of about Brock's age who wore horn-rimmed spectacles which should have made him look wise instead of exactly like Harold Lloyd. This was Mr. Corson, the District Attorney. He talked in lowered tones with Julius Krouse who had taken the seat next to him on the platform. The coroner's jury, their chairs arranged at one side facing the platform, were all in their places, farmers and clerks of stores in the village, gathered together by the coroner in his hurried tour of the town. The faces of most of them were familiar to Brock and two of them he knew—Snyder, of the cigar store, and Williamson, the baggage man at the railroad station.

Thomas Jefferson Johnson was the first witness put upon the stand. He wore his best suit of clothes in deference to the importance of the occasion and, while he tried to create an appearance of being very much at his ease, he wriggled in his chair and rolled his eyes around the room as though seeking mental escape from his predicament. His testimony was substantially that given to Dr. Burlingame and Mr. Krouse the morning after the murder and seemed to create a very good impression. If Johnson had been expecting questions that would break down his testimony or suggest that

he knew more about the crime than he was willing to admit, he was permitted to step down at the end of his story which was accepted as it was told. Brock was surprised at the leniency of the examination, for Mr. Krouse by the side of the coroner, suggested many of the questions. Dr. Burlingame seemed to take for granted the affection of the negro for his employer, the truth of his statements, and the soundness of his slumbers. No question about buttoned shoes, none about Johnson's visit to the Farmers National Bank where the money was paid over to Trudeau. Whatever Krouse's game, he was not ready to prejudice his own investigations by letting Johnson know what he suspected.

The negro was pleased to have been let off so easily and, though his face was solemn as he took his seat, his eyes stopped rolling about and he let forth a gasp that was interpreted as one of great relief.

Brock was called next by Dr. Burlingame.

"Where were you on the night of the seventeenth of April, Mr. Brock?"

"The seventeenth—at Mrs. Magruder's, where I am living."

"You were in the house all the evening before going to bed?"

"No, sir—not in the early evening. I went out gunning."

"Where did you go?"

"Out the Laurel woods road, through the fields, and part way up Laurel Mountain."

"Anybody see you while you were out?"

"Why yes, several people. I passed Mr. Slosson in the road as I was coming home."

"At what time did you get back to Mrs. Magruder's?"

"Between eight and nine, I'd say. It was dark."

"What did you do then?"

"I was so tired that I went right to bed."

"And you didn't go out again that night?"

"No, sir. I didn't wake up until morning."

"Who else lives in the house?"

"Only Mrs. Magruder and her daughter."

"Now tell us what happened from the moment you woke up until the arrival of the police."

Brock did so. Nothing of Brock's share in Krouse's investigation was demanded, for with Brock's account of the arrival of Dr. Burlingame the examination came to a close.

Mrs. Magruder came next.

"You're a neighbor of Trudeau's, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"What do you know about him?"

"Nothing. I might have liked him if he'd ever have given me a chance to."

"He wasn't neighborly then?"

"No. But that's none of my business."

"Mr. Brock, who just testified, is your nephew?"

"Yes."

"Did you see him when he came in to go to bed last Monday, the seventeenth?"

"Yes."

"He went up to his room?"

"Yes. But I don't see what that's got to do with Emile Trudeau."

"You saw him go to bed?"

"Now see here, Dr. Burlingame—" she began indig-

nantly. A ripple of laughter swept lightly over the room. The coroner's large face flushed in embarrassment.

"What I'm trying to bring out, Mrs. Magruder, is that Mr. Brock didn't go to Trudeau's that night."

"Of course he wasn't at Trudeau's that night," she said angrily. "How could he be at Trudeau's and in my house in bed at the same time?"

The coroner's features expanded in a smile.

"Of course he couldn't. But why are you so certain that Mr. Brock wasn't at Trudeau's that night?"

"Because he'd gone to bed. I knew he was there because I saw the light in his room and went in and turned it out."

"Oh, so you turned out the light!"

"Of course I turned out the light. Do you think I wanted it to burn all night?"

"That's all, Mrs. Magruder."

And Aunt Julia stepped down to the seat by her nephew who had taken a great delight in the dialogue.

Archie McDermott was the next witness called.

He gave Judith a smile as he passed her.

"Mr. McDermott," the coroner's thin voice squeaked, "your name has been given us as one of the visitors to Castle Rock during the week before the discovery of the dead body. Will you tell the jury what you went up there for?"

"Certainly." Archie gave Judith another smile, a smile of understanding, Brock thought. "I went up there to find out when Miss Kennedy was coming home. I had to go to New York and wanted to be sure I'd be here when she came."

"So you had to go to New York. Were you there

on the night of the seventeenth—when the murder was committed?"

"I was."

"Where did you stay?"

"At the Transylvania Hotel."

"I see. When did you get back from New York?"

"Yesterday. I found the summons for the inquest at my father's house."

"Well, you saw Trudeau before the crime was committed and talked with him?"

"I did."

"In the library upstairs?"

"No. Johnson told me he was down in the chicken yard, so I went down there."

"Did you notice anything strange or peculiar in Mr. Trudeau's manner?"

"He was busy dusting some hens. He might have shown that he didn't want to be disturbed."

"What did Trudeau say when you asked him when Miss Kennedy was coming home?"

"He said he didn't know."

"How long did you talk to him?"

"Oh, ten minutes or so."

"And that's all you talked about for ten minutes?"

"Well, we might have talked about the weather or politics."

"Nothing else? Nothing that might give you the impression that he was very much worried about something?"

"No."

"You didn't visit Mr. Trudeau again before the night of the seventeenth?"

"I did not."

The coroner leaned over to Mr. Krouse, whispering a moment, and then Archie McDermott was excused.

The elder McDermott's testimony referred to a clutch of eggs. He had noticed nothing peculiar in Trudeau's manner.

Mr. Mallory whose testimony followed, merely described a conversation about the purchase of the hay in Trudeau's meadow. His son's testimony was scarcely more valuable but it threw a light on the irascibility of the old man. Young Mallory had been gunning along the stream which bordered Trudeau's meadow and had fired some shots there. Trudeau had come running down, waving his arms. When Trudeau found out who it was his anger cooled a little, but he gave the young man a lesson on the cruelty of shooting just for sport, calling Mallory a young idiot and at last ordered him off the place.

"Had you been on good terms with Trudeau before that?"

"Yes, I had."

"Is it true that he resented your attentions to his niece, Miss Kennedy?"

"If he did I didn't know it."

"That's all, Mr. Mallory."

Dr. Wylie proved a valuable witness for Trudeau.

"You are Mr. Trudeau's family physician, aren't you, Doctor?"

"I am."

"What were you called to treat him for?"

"He suffered from gout, a rheumatic condition of his joints and muscles which affected him in damp or rainy weather."

"How old is Mr. Trudeau?"

"Seventy-one, I think."

"And did this condition interfere with his happiness —or prevent him working out of doors?"

"Yes, it did. He was always better in summer. But in winter he was under my care a great deal."

"Were his organs all in good condition?"

"Yes, for a man of his years. But his blood pressure was high. He was getting old and beginning to show it."

"But the testimony shows he was in the habit of working in his chicken run and vegetable garden. He was strong enough for that?"

"Mr. Trudeau was hard to control. I think he often overtaxed his strength."

"Would you say that he was feeble, then?"

"Yes. At times he seemed much older than his age, but his mind was always alert."

"You've examined the body of the dead man, Dr. Wylie. Would you say that Trudeau could have overpowered the visitor or given him the blow that killed him?"

"On my general knowledge of the affair the thought is absurd. Any man, even an old man, could deal a blow with a heavy implement that would crush a skull, if the skull was thin enough. This dead man's occipital bone, where the blow was struck, is very thick."

"And you don't think Trudeau struck that blow?"

"No, I don't."

"If he was desperate, for instance?"

"Well, perhaps. But he would have to strike the blow when the other man was off his guard. The location of the wound doesn't indicate that."

"And in the case of a struggle—in case Trudeau was attacked by this man?"

"There could only have been one result to a man of Trudeau's age and physical condition. He would have been overpowered if not badly hurt."

There was a stir in the court room quickly hushed by the next question.

"You are a friend of Trudeau's?"

"I am."

"Isn't your testimony a little prejudiced by this friendship?"

"No," said Wylie, glaring at the coroner. "I won't lie for any man. You've asked me questions, I've given you my answers to them."

There was a pause in which Burlingame whispered with Mr. Krouse again and then Dr. Wylie, the fire still in his eyes, took his seat in the audience.

At the call of the name of Daumier, a man rose from the place where he had been sitting with Squire McDermott and his wife. As he took the stand his distinguished appearance caused a murmur. He was a man of sixty-five, tall, well groomed and wore glasses in a tortoise-shell frame, to which was fastened a wide silken riband. He spoke with a slight accent.

"You are Bertrand Daumier?"

"I am."

"Brother-in-law of Squire McDermott, I believe?"

"Yes."

The coroner nodded pleasantly as though this information was agreeable to him.

"How many years have you known Emile Trudeau?"

"Let me see—twenty-five years at least."

"Where did you meet him?"

"In New York."

"Did you have any business relations with him?"

"No. He was in the wine importing business for a while. We met as Frenchmen and as friends."

"You were very good friends."

"Yes. He did me a great service once."

"Do you mind telling the nature of that service?"

"Not at all. My firm got into financial difficulties and at my request Mr. Trudeau helped us out."

"You were under obligations to him then?"

"Yes."

"Did you know when you met Mr. Trudeau anything of his past history?"

"Very little. I knew that he had made a great deal of money. One doesn't feel the need of the past history of a man who does you a service like the one he did me."

"You took him then, you might say, on faith."

"Yes. You might say that."

The coroner glanced at some notes on the desk before him. "Then, Mr. Daumier, you felt that you were only doing your duty, to Mr. Trudeau, when you accepted the commission on one of your visits to France, to try and find out the whereabouts of Pierre Duval?"

Daumier was staggered by the question. He stared at the floor a moment before replying. But his voice was quite firm as he replied, "Yes, I did."

"Did you know anything of the relationship that existed between Mr. Trudeau and this man Duval?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Did you know that this man Duval was a criminal —sought by the police?"

"Not when Mr. Trudeau and I first spoke of the matter. Later I did— But I do not understand what this has to do with—"

"Just this, Mr. Daumier," squeaked the coroner, rising to the full dignity of the information, "for we have reason to believe that this Pierre Duval whom you found is the man who was killed in Trudeau's house last Monday night."

Mr. Daumier gasped and changed color but said nothing. He was profoundly moved by the information and taking out a silk handkerchief nervously wiped his glasses.

"Before we go on with your examination, Mr. Daumier, I wish some letters to be read which will explain the reasons for my questions. If you will step aside for a moment I will call Miss Jane Robinson."

Evidently still greatly perturbed Mr. Daumier stepped down and Miss Robinson took his place.

"Miss Robinson, you are a teacher of French in the State Normal School at Northampton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you please translate into English these letters as I hand them to you, so that the jury will understand what they say."

Miss Robinson took the letters and translated as she read.

It was not until the second letter from Madame Benoit was read that the people in the court room having shown signs of restlessness began to be interested again. For here was the disclosure of Bertrand Daumier's part in the affair—the betrayal of the name and address of Daumier by the lawyer Bontemps. "The

purse of Bertrand Daumier is bottomless. You should therefore know how to make this information profitable to us both. It is quite possible that he is the very man you're looking for. . . ."

CHAPTER IX

THE INQUEST CONTINUED

THERE was another stir of interest as Monsieur Daumier was recalled. He was well known in Laurel where he had spent many summers at the Laurel Mountain House. He had apparently had time to gather his thoughts together for he was quite composed when the coroner questioned again.

"These letters, Mr. Daumier, were found in the suitcase of the dead man at the Northampton Hotel, where he registered under the name of Georges Merillat—"

"Merillat!"

"You've heard that name before?"

"Yes. A Frenchman who visited my office in New York."

"You did not know he was Pierre Duval?"

"I did not. Of course I had never seen Pierre Duval. He was only a name to me."

"Tell us in your own way, then, what you know."

"I must, of course, since my name has been brought so prominently into this affair. When Monsieur Trudeau asked me to do this service for him he told me nothing of the past. He pledged me to secrecy—a pledge which I only break under compulsion of the law. I knew nothing then of Duval, merely that Trudeau wished to find him so that he might pay him some money that he thought was due. The lawyer Bontemps was employed by me—under the name of Vibert,

complying with Trudeau's request that all negotiations should be secret. Bontemps made some investigations the nature of which he confided to me. Madame Benoit revealed the fact that Duval had escaped from prison some years before. He never told me of the crime for which he had been imprisoned. Probably Madame Benoit did not tell him. I did not ask. It was none of my affair, I was merely acting for Trudeau and had succeeded in my quest. With Duval found, I also made the arrangements with the Paris bank. My mission accomplished, I returned to America and told Trudeau of my success."

"And when Duval or Merillat visited your office, did he speak of a man he was hunting for?"

"No. He was a stranger to me giving the name of Georges Merillat. I did not know him from Adam. He represented himself as a traveler from my country seeking a chance to invest in America."

"You did not know that he was searching for Emile Trudeau?"

"I don't know it now. But in the light of those letters it seems probable."

"Or that the debt of Trudeau to Duval was a moral obligation for a wrong Trudeau had done to Duval in the past?"

"I did not. Trudeau was a man of generous impulses. He had proved that to me. I did not question him. I had no right to."

The coroner consulted for a moment with the District Attorney.

"We have evidence from the Farmers National Bank, that Trudeau drew twenty thousand dollars from the bank on Friday last. That money was part of the

bottomless purse of Bertrand Daumier, representing Emile Trudeau, mentioned in the letter of Madame Benoit. That money has disappeared. Did you know anything about it, Mr. Daumier?"

"No, sir. This is the first I've heard of it."

The District Attorney bent toward the coroner suggesting a question.

"How did this man Merillat, or Duval, succeed in discovering that Trudeau was the man he was hunting for?"

"I don't know. It mystifies me."

"Did Merillat come to see you often?"

"Yes. He was a nuisance. But as he was a countryman of mine I tried to be hospitable. He asked me a great many questions about my friends. I thought him very curious."

"Did you describe Trudeau or mention him?"

"I may have. I don't remember."

"Well, he found his way here somehow, Mr. Daumier, through you or some one else. You'll see how important it is for your own sake to tell all you know."

"But I've told all I know," Daumier protested with some heat. "I knew nothing of Merillat—or of his blackmailing schemes. I'm hardly the kind of a man to take part in any such villainy—least of all against a man who had been my benefactor."

The man seemed honest, his position well assured. So he was excused and a short recess taken while the coroner conferred with Mr. Krouse and Mr. Corson.

"Mr. Holtzhauer," the coroner called at last. A stout man with a red face who had been sitting near Brock rose and took the stand. Brock noticed that Julius Krouse got up from his seat and stood with his

back to a window at one side where he remained with folded arms during the remainder of the inquiry.

"Mr. Holtzhauer, you are the proprietor of a garage in Northampton?" the coroner asked.

"I am."

"You have seen the body of this Georges Merillat at Warfield's undertaking establishment?"

"I have."

"Did you recognize the body as that of a man you had seen before?"

"I did."

"Where had you seen him?"

"He came to my garage and hired a touring car last Saturday afternoon."

"Did he tell you where he was going with it?"

"No. He couldn't speak much English. I made out he was going to drive in the country to look at some land."

"Was there any one with him when he left the garage?"

"No."

"He seemed to know how to drive?"

"Yes. He said he had once been a taxi driver in Paris."

"Did he give you any references?"

"Only Mr. Mehl at the hotel."

"What time did Merillat get back to the garage Saturday?"

"Around ten, I'd say."

"Did Merillat leave anything in your car?"

"Yes, a glove."

"Is this the glove?" And the coroner handed him the article to examine. It was a gray buckskin glove

of the kind that sells for about four dollars a pair.

"It looks like it. It's the glove if it's the one I handed Mr. Krouse."

"Why didn't you give it to him when you saw him again?"

"I forgot to."

"And he came again to the garage, didn't he, last Monday night?"

"He did—about eight o'clock."

"Did he say where he was going, then?"

"No. But I thought he might have made some friends in the neighborhood."

"Did he say anything to you about what time he'd be back?"

"Yes. He said he would be gone about three hours."

"He didn't come back—did he?"

"No. I waited for him until midnight and then shut the garage up for the night."

"And the next morning?"

"I went around and asked Mr. Mehl if he had heard from him."

"What did you do then?"

"I waited to hear from him. Nothing happened until Tuesday afternoon when Mr. Krouse called me up and told me about a car that had been abandoned in a lane below Fisher's farm."

"And you drove up to Laurel and identified the car as yours?"

"I did."

"It was in good condition?"

"Yes. It hadn't been driven far. I could tell that by the gas and speedometer, but it was pretty well spattered up with tar."

"Is there any fresh tar on the road between Fisher's farm and Northampton?"

"No. The only fresh tar is on the road along the lake beyond the Laurel Mountain House."

"That indicated, didn't it, that Merillat had gone out the Lake Boulevard before parking the car in Fisher's Lane?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's all, Mr. Holtzhauer," said the coroner.

And as the man went to his seat the name of James Luther was called. He was the owner and operator of a filling station about midway between Northampton and Laurel.

"In your business, Mr. Luther," the coroner asked, "you've learned to recognize most of the cars that belong around here, haven't you?"

"Yes. Pretty well."

"And you know this touring car that Mr. Holtzhauer hired out Saturday afternoon?"

"Yes. I sold it to him," said Luther with a grin at Holtzhauer. "It's got a bum transmission."

"And this car stopped at your station for oil Saturday?"

"Yes."

"At what time, Saturday?"

"Late Saturday. It was dark already, between eight and nine."

"How many people were in the car?"

"Two men. There may have been others in the tonneau but the curtains were up."

"Did you recognize either of the men?"

"No. It was pretty dark and my lights were on."

"Can you describe them at all?"

"Well. The man who paid for the gas was about fifty-five, I'd say, and spoke a foreign lingo. It was the other man did the talking."

"How old a man?"

"Not old. Young, I'd say, from his voice. I thought I'd seen him before along the road but I wouldn't be certain. He had his hat pulled over his eyes."

"Was he a big man?"

"I couldn't say."

"Light or dark?"

"I didn't notice. He was smooth shaven."

"What *did* you notice in particular about him?"

"Nothing much. He looked like a good dresser."

"American?"

"He talked like one. He was smoking a cigarette."

"You wouldn't be able to identify him if you saw him?"

"No, I guess not."

The District Attorney leaned suddenly to the coroner and prompted a question.

"Mr. Luther, we're very anxious to get a general idea of what this second man looked like. For any companion of Merillat is very important to this investigation. Is there anybody in the court of the same build and general appearance as the man with Merillat in that machine?"

Luther looked around the court room. "Well, I'd say he was about the general build and make up of two of your witnesses—Mr. Brock here—or Mr. Billy Mallory."

There was a buzz of interest in the court, quickly subdued by the coroner, who then resumed his questions.

"Notice anything unusual about those men, Mr. Luther?"

"No. Nothing unusual. I think maybe they'd been having a drink or so."

"Which way did they go when they got the oil?"

"Toward Laurel."

"Did you see that car again that night?"

"Yes. I'm pretty sure I saw it going toward Northampton later."

As the man stepped down Brock realized that another alibi was to be required of him. He realized too the absurdity that his position was difficult.

"Mr. Brock, where were you on Saturday evening between eight and nine?"

"At my aunt's, Mrs. Magruder's, in the dining room reading."

"Was Mrs. Magruder at home then?"

"No. My aunt had gone to a meeting at the church about half past seven."

"Was there anybody else in the house?"

"No. My Cousin Elsie, having no lessons to study, went with her."

"Then they can't prove that you were there when you say you were."

"No. They didn't get home until after ten. But of course they found me there."

"And you deny that you were the man in the automobile with Merillat?"

"Of course I do," said Brock with a smile.

The coroner produced the glove found in Holtzhauer's machine.

"Is this your glove?"

"No. It isn't," he said.

"Would you mind trying it on?"

"If it gives you any amusement," Brock said ironically. He was on the point of losing his temper but he tried the glove on. It fitted admirably. "That's not my glove," he added, frowning. "I never saw it before."

"All right, Mr. Brock. I'll call William Mallory."

It was the young man who had been poaching on Trudeau's preserve. He was strongly built, with light hair and wore a ruddy air of bewilderment.

"You've heard what Mr. Luther said?"

"Yes, Doctor. But you can bet your life if I'd had anything to do with the Merillat case I wouldn't be fooling around here."

"Where were you Saturday evening between eight and nine?"

"Shooting a game of pool back of Snyder's cigar store."

"Will Mr. Snyder testify to that?"

"If he don't, I'll break his neck. There were three or four other fellows there—George Reifsnyder—"

"Is this your glove?"

Mallory took the thing up and tried to put it on. It was much too small for him. "I guess that lets me out, don't it, Doc?"

"All right, Mr. Mallory," said the coroner with dignity.

Brock was not sure whether he ought to be angry or amused at the incident. He was aware of the members of the jury staring at him and he felt uncomfortable under their scrutiny. It was just one more of those curious circumstances that seemed bent on connecting him with the Castle Rock mystery. What dif-

ference would it have made to these people if he had told them that he was so absorbed in the reading of *Penguin Island* that he was entirely oblivious of the passage of time—so abstracted in fact that when his Aunt Julia and Elsie had returned it seemed to him that they had only been gone for a few moments!

He forgot his discomfort and the unpleasantness of his thoughts when the coroner called the name of Judith Kennedy.

A little murmur of sympathy and appreciation went around as she took the stand. She had gone to school in this very room and many of the people in the crowd had been her friends since childhood. Enemies she had, of course. It was the natural result of her culture in this environment among the "dumm Dutchies," as Krouse called them, who had prejudices against the higher education and thought for reasons of their own that Judith considered herself a stripe superior to their wives and daughters. But she faced them, her head erect, but very pale, answering the questions in a clear voice.

"Mr. Trudeau is your uncle by marriage?"

"Yes. My father was Mrs. Trudeau's brother."

"And since the death of your parents, your aunt took care of you?"

"Yes."

"Your uncle was always kind to you?"

"Kindness itself. He was like a father."

"And you loved him?"

"Always."

"Will you tell me if you've ever noticed anything peculiar about Mr. Trudeau?"

"What do you mean by peculiar?"

"Well, Miss Kennedy, you wrote him a number of letters from Bryn Mawr College. I have them here. They were found in his desk. Some of them seem to show a great deal of anxiety about his happiness. Did he ever indicate to you that he was worried about anything?"

"In his letters—yes."

"That he was apprehensive?"

Judith glanced at Brock.

"Yes," she replied again.

"You didn't know that he expected this visitor, Mr. Merillat?"

"No. I never heard the name until yesterday."

"Do you know anything of Mr. Trudeau's past history?"

"Very little. He didn't speak much of himself even to my aunt in her lifetime. He was born in France—where I don't know, though I've heard him speak of the Loire River and the French château near Tours. For a long time he was in the West Indies in business and then he came to New York."

"How long did he live in New York?"

"Five or six years. He met my aunt there and they were married. It was then that they took me into the family."

"When did Mr. Trudeau move to Laurel?"

"In 1908."

"You were about five years old then?"

"I was."

"You know, of course, that your uncle is a rich man?"

"I supposed he was well off. I never thought much about it. I always had everything I wanted."

"You never heard how he made his money?"

"In the West Indies, I supposed—or in the wine business."

"You never knew any of his associates of past years?"

"Yes. Mr. Daumier."

The coroner consulted Mr. Corson for a moment before he spoke again.

"What made you leave college in the middle of the term to return to your home?"

"I was worried about Mr. Trudeau."

"Why?"

"Because of the kind of letters he wrote me during the past two weeks."

"Will you explain the kind of letters you mean?"

"Well, they were worded very strangely, I couldn't understand them."

"You mean that he referred to some danger that threatened him?"

"Not at first. Just phrases that puzzled me."

"Do you remember any of those phrases?"

"Yes. He spoke of 'sin' being 'triumphant.' "

"Oh, yes. That was the subject of the little bronze statue he had on his desk."

"It was."

"What other phrases?"

"A strange one—'the beautiful eyes of my cash box have played the wanton.' And another, 'It is only the dead who do not return.' I could not understand them then. I think I do now."

"Have you any of these letters?"

"I left them at Bryn Mawr—all except the last—"

"Will you read it?"

"Yes. I want to read it, because it will show you as it does me that my uncle was in a kind of terror of some threat that hung over him." She read:

"CHERIE [that's what he always called me],

"Perhaps you have noticed a worry in my previous letters to you.

"I do not wish to frighten you but things are not well with me. I am sick—in mind and body. I think I need the touch of your hand and the sound of your voice to give me heart in the last few steps I may take in my earthly journey. I grow old. The years press upon me with the weight of lead. I am no longer a Prisoner of Hope. I have been set free into a Kingdom of Despair where I am only a puppet in the hands of powers of darkness that are too strong for me. My peace—always a mockery at best—is threatened. Nay, more—it is gone. Your happiness too, perhaps. I cannot resist. I am beaten and destroyed. Come to me, chérie, if only for a little while that I may gain strength from your youth and courage. Without you I am too feeble to resist.

"E. T."

She read the phrases in a trembling voice almost overcome by emotion. The silence of the room was a tribute to her—a silence that continued a long moment when she lowered the letter and faced her inquisitor again. As the coroner did not speak at once she went on passionately:

"Is that the letter of a man who has nerved himself to do a murder? Does he not say that he is beaten and

destroyed? That he accepts this retribution that comes to him out of the past and dreads that I must share it? I wish to God I could share it, whatever it is. For whatever he owed this dead man, he has already paid for it —in pity and in tears."

Her eyes had filled. The jury fidgeted and two "dumm Dutchies" took out bandanna handkerchiefs and blew their noses violently.

Judith bent her head, still breathing deeply. She did not know that she had won, but Brock knew it. And Mr. Krouse had returned from his post by the window. Brock knew that there was still important evidence to be submitted, but that it would not be required now.

The coroner, his features contracting in a frown, asked Miss Kennedy a few perfunctory questions.

"Did you know of any past wrong that Emile Trudeau had done to any one?"

"No."

"Or any moral obligation of his?"

"No."

"That's all, Miss Kennedy."

The verdict rendered within ten minutes, was that "Georges Merillat came to his death on the night of the seventeenth of April at the hands of a person or persons unknown to this jury."

CHAPTER X

THE TALE OF A SHIRT

BROCK read late—hoping for the brain fag that would induce sleep. He succeeded, passing a good night and awaking refreshed. When he came down to breakfast Mrs. Magruder greeted him with a surprise.

"I wish that Julius Krouse would keep away from here. He's getting on my nerves. He was here at daylight fooling around outside. I think he must be crazy."

"What was he doing?"

"Oh, running around in circles on the lawn and in the drive and putting a lot of white stuff out of a tin bucket all over the place. You can see the marks of it out there now."

"H-m. Did you speak to him?"

"Yes. I asked him what he was doing and I wasn't any too pleasant, I guess. He straightened up, frowning. 'Just mixing up some feed for the chickens,' he said. Then he grinned at me like a fool. He put his tools and bucket in the Ford and drove away as if the devil was after him."

"Footprints," Brock muttered.

"Oh! Well, what does he want to take footprints around here for?"

"Out on the front lawn and driveway too?" Brock asked curiously.

"Yes. You might think the whole place had been overrun with murderers. It makes me nervous. And then, he must have left this sticking under the door, where I found it when I came down."

She produced a square envelope with Brock's name printed in pencil marks on the outside.

"Why can't he write like a white man instead of printing this note like a child?" Mrs. Magruder added as Brock took the envelope from her.

He knew that this new message was not from Julius Krouse, for it was almost a replica of the one that had been thrust between the slats of the shutters two nights ago. Of course he was curious, but as Mrs. Magruder was curious too, he put the note, with an air of indifference, into his pocket and went to the breakfast table; for he knew that his Aunt Julia would be very much alarmed if she knew how much the house of Magruder seemed to be involved in the Trudeau mystery.

But as soon as he could do so without further exciting the curiosity of his aunt, he went up to his room and tore open the envelope.

IT'S LUCKY FOR YOU YOU TOOK MY WARNING. MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS. I'LL SHOOT STRAIGHTER NEXT TIME. DON'T FORGET THE GOODS ARE ON YOU.

Brock's first feeling after curiosity was one of anger. This writer of obscure messages was getting under his skin. He didn't like being bullied by any one, even for logical reasons; still less did he like to be bullied by a person he didn't know and for reasons that he could

not understand. His anger was not mitigated in the least by the thought that the whole series of incidents might be based on mistaken identity. Indeed he rather wished that the issue, whatever it was, between this unknown enemy and himself, was more clearly defined, so that he could know what it was that the other fellow was warning, threatening, and trying to kill him for.

As for the inquest which the writer of course alluded to, Brock had told all he knew. He wished he had known more to tell for he was sure now that the man who wrote these two messages was the fellow he had chased in the dark—undoubtedly the murderer of Georges Merillat. Moreover, since this last message had come during the night, before the local paper could publish the report of the inquest, he knew that this man *had been present at the inquest* and had heard the testimony that Brock had given.

"Mind your own business." That was precisely what Brock did not intend to do. The first message had bewildered him, the shots in the night had awakened him to the desperateness of the man's purpose, but this second message aroused a determination to go more deeply into the investigation and leave nothing undone that might bring the fellow to book. The same phrase too, about "the goods" being "on him." A stupid enough threat to an innocent man, denoting the wish, already suggested to Brock's mind, to involve him in some way, in a participation in the killing.

The man, it seemed, was clever, too clever perhaps in his use of the childish printed letter which did not conceal either in spelling or phrase the fact that he was an educated man. Brock had a good memory for faces, for he had been trained to this, and he tried to remem-

ber one by one the personalities of those who had sat in the crowd yesterday in the schoolhouse—the rows of stupid bovine faces of the "dumm Dutchies" and their wives, the clerks, the farmers, the small merchants of the village, the witnesses, the men of the jury even, hoping for some flash of intuition to enlighten him. Even by the process of elimination his result was unsatisfactory. He remembered that Julius Krouse had relinquished his post by the side of the coroner to stand by the window for a while. He must have had an object in doing this—perhaps to make the same study at first hand that Brock was making from memory; but what had it availed him?

At last Brock gave up the attempt and sitting down at his table wrote out a new list of clues based on the inquest which might lead to definite results.

1. Johnson. Under suspicion. He didn't hear the shots when he should have heard them. Queer manner in his talk with me. Johnson not the message writer or the man who had delivered the messages for the footprints were those of another, but he knows something about the crime. Watch everything Johnson does at night in the village. Then perhaps a good "sweating" or "third degree."

2. Archie McDermott. No one above suspicion. This man might be watched with the others.

3. Billy Mallory—same. Pretty fresh. This may be a pose. Find out about this fellow from Miss Kennedy.

4. Dr. Wylie. Good old scout.

5. Bertrand Daumier. Curious inconsistencies in evidence about Duval-Merillat. Query: would any man get as close to the smell of a mystery

without curiosity? This man protests too much—relies too much on the respectability of his spats and silk eyeglass riband. Obviously he gave Merillat Trudeau's address. How? And why?

6. Judith Kennedy. Does she know any more than she has already told?

7. George Reifsnyder also saw Trudeau get the money from the bank.

8. That fool glove. Well-known maker, from good haberdasher in New York. "Toney" fellow, all right.

9. Tar on the machine. Why did Merillat drive out the Lake Boulevard Monday night? Whom did he go to see? And why did he come back, park his car in Fisher's Lane and then go hide in the bushes? Query: Had the "toney" fellow preceded him? This is interesting. Johnson knows. Why isn't he willing to tell? Fear? Fear for the "toney" fellow or for himself? Or for both?

This mental exercise diverted Brock for a while, but it ended only in a series of questions which arrived nowhere. So he dropped his pencil with a sigh and gazed out of his window looking over the driveway and lawn which were marked here and there with the white patches of plaster of Paris where Julius Krouse had been making his casts. Brock went down and outside the house, bending over the nearest white patch at the edge of the drive and examining it carefully. It seemed a good deal like the ones behind the beech tree, but on comparison he found a difference in the shape of the sole. The shoe that had made this print was heavy, and there were no marks of rubber heels in the new footprints in the drive. So Brock

fitted his own shoe into the print. *It was the print of his own shoe,* the one he wore at that moment!

The slight shock of surprise at this discovery was disconcerting. What the devil did Krouse want *his* footprints for? He was inclined at the moment to share Mrs. Magruder's opinions of the little man. This reminded him that Krouse had spied upon his meeting with Judith Kennedy when they had gone to Castle Rock. If Krouse had wanted one of Brock's footprints why hadn't he said so. The little man wasn't playing fair. This wasn't the way to treat a fellow who was doing all he could to help in the investigation. Of what did Krouse suspect him? What fact was the little man trying to verify? He was sure of one thing at the moment and this was that Julius Krouse would have to explain his actions or call on some one else to help him.

He did not have long to wait, for as he was walking back toward the porch, a flivver dashed in at the gate and the little man hailed him.

"Hi, Mr. Brock. I got something maybe you like to do a'ready."

The tone was amiable, the smile that went with it quite ingenuous, but Brock did not smile or return the greeting.

"If it's anything like taking some of my own footprints you can count me out."

Instead of being disconcerted, Julius Krouse showed instead wide-eyed surprise.

"Say, you're, now, stringing me. Ain't?"

"No. I'm not stringing you. What do you want to come around here taking my footprints for? Do

you want me to think you suspect me of having something to do with this crime?"

"Say, now, Mr. Brock—"

"There in the dirt on the edge of the drive! Maybe you'll tell me you didn't make that cast this morning."

"You mean, now, that's *your* footprint!"

"Yes, it's mine. What are you trying to put on me? I don't like being spied on and followed around—"

Krouse had sprung down from the machine and caught Brock by the arm.

"*Your* shoe! You had pointy-toed shoes on yesterday. I thought it was some other fella been snooping around here. You!"

He pressed Brock's arm eagerly again. "Did you have these shoes on when you went to Trudeau's Tuesday morning? No, you didn't. You had on white flannels and buckskin shoes."

"Well, what's it all about?"

"Just this, Mr. Brock. Somebody with those shoes on went walking across Trudeau's field since the rain Sunday night."

"Somebody! Who?"

"If you didn't do it—I don't know."

"How could I have done it when I wasn't there between Thursday and Tuesday morning? You've made a mistake."

"No. I saw them Tuesday morning a'ready and covered them with a box, until I could get a cast. The heels worn down, ain't? See. Six nails on the outside. Ain't?"

Brock leaned against the porch and took off his left shoe. There was no doubt about the accuracy of Krouse's description.

"Well, there may be a difference between my footprints and those others. At any rate why would anybody borrow those shoes unless—" Brock paused.

"Unless what?"

"Unless somebody has been trying to 'frame' me."

Krouse folded his arms and frowned up into Brock's face, studying it for a moment, then he grinned.

"Now don't you go worrying about what I think, Mr. Brock. I got my own ideas a'ready. And I know the fella that killed Merillat wasn't you. I ain't telling you for why I know it, but that don't make no difference. I said once a'ready this case is kind of nutty. But there ain't no nut you can't now crack sometime."

Mr. Krouse's manner was so obvious in its desire to be friendly that Brock found himself smiling.

"Well, I've been thinking I'm a little nutty myself."

"Us, we'll work it out, Mr. Brock. Maybe I got some ideas who that fella is. But I got to work around to proving it sideways. I got to be going down to New York in a coupla days. I thought maybe you wouldn't mind going with me. You know the ropes and all. We got to investigate this here Hotel Maupin Merillat stayed at. We got to get a line on Daumier. He's maybe holding something back."

"I agree with that. There's a nigger in that woodpile."

"Yah. Two niggers. Daumier and Johnson. I got something on Johnson a'ready but I can't use it. He knows who killed Merillat but I ain't ready to use him yet. He'd only lie if we arrested him. He won't tell what he knows because he's afraid of his own position—"

"You mean you suspect that he had a part in the killing—"

"No. Not the killing. I ain't saying what I mean—except that he can't tell the story without putting himself in wrong. We got to hold up on Johnson."

"Is he being watched when he's in the village?"

"Yah—but I can't now be more than two places at once."

"Well, what are you going to do next?"

Instead of replying, Mr. Krouse asked a question.

"Who does your laundry work, Mr. Brock, since you been up here a'ready?"

"The Eureka, I believe, in Northampton," Brock replied, puzzled.

"Good. I thought maybe they did—since Mrs. Magruder don't do no washing. Have you maybe, got a blue shirt—?"

"See here, Mr. Krouse," Brock broke in angrily.

"Don't get huffy, now," Krouse grinned cheerfully. "We got to find this here toney fella's shirt; ain't I said it wasn't you? You ain't got blond hair, have you? I thought maybe you wouldn't mind driving down to the Eureka and telling them you left some gold cuff buttons in the sleeves. Get the idea a'ready? I don't want them to know I'm inwestigating anything, but you could do it all right. Maybe it won't lead to nothing, but we got to follow every clue where it leads."

"I suppose I might. But my aunt is going to take the car to drive out to her cousin's farm for lunch."

"Well, the laundry from Laurel was all collected by the wagon yesterday a'ready. Maybe I better drive you down now, once."

The little man seemed to have a peculiar fascination for Brock. He was so friendly and so wise, ignoring apparently, for good reasons of his own, the curious chain of incidents, or as many of the incidents as he knew, which suggested Brock's presence at Castle Rock on the night of the crime. They were rather astonishing as Brock summed them up: *Penguin Island,* his thumb print on the sticky stuff on the book; the message of the murderer; the perfectly fitting glove; Brock's lack of a convincing alibi at the inquest, and last, this second message. In a burst of confidence, Brock brought forth the second message and showed it to Krouse—who looked at it with his wooden-Indian expression, reading it aloud like a schoolboy parsing a sentence.

"It's lucky for you you took my warning. Mind your own business. I'll shoot straighter next time. . . ."

"Say. He's, now, got his nerve. He still thinks you know. Ain't?"

"Or else, he's trying to frame me."

"Yah. Maybe, because you saw Trudeau more'n anybody and he thinks Trudeau told you something."

"Well, I'm sick of him, Mr. Krouse. I've got to get that fellow if it's the last thing I do."

"Yah. We'll get him, Mr. Brock. He's pretty slick, I tell you, and he don't think nobody suspects him yet. We don't want him to think nobody suspects him. So after a while he gets a little careless and gives me the chance to make an arrest."

"You mean—" cried Brock, "that you know who he is?"

Mr. Krouse frowned at the wheels of the muddy flivver. "I got a fella suspicioned, a'ready."

"Was he in the crowd at the inquest? Did he testify? Does he live in Laurel or Northampton?"

As Brock shot these questions at him Mr. Krouse clambered up into the flivver and stepped on the self-starter, his face still grave, his lips drawn tightly around the chewed end of his corkscrew cigar, but he made no reply. And though Brock asked him a great many questions on the ride to Northampton he only grinned in reply.

"If I told you, Mr. Brock, you'd know as much as I do a'ready," he said at last.

They parked the car opposite the Court House. Mr. Krouse went in to see the District Attorney and Brock found his way to the Eureka Laundry. To the young lady in the office he stated the purpose of his visit as Mr. Krouse had suggested and was led into a rear building filled with machinery dedicated to the uses of those fortunate persons of Northampton County who could afford to discard the traditional flannel. There were jangling machines and mangling machines where bright-faced girls assisted in the rite that is next to godliness. Piles of soiled linen in bins, other piles of clean linen just emerged from the wringers. Smells of soap and starch and steam. . . .

The young lady questioned some of the operators who professed that they had not seen Mr. Brock's cuff buttons.

"It would be in the bins, or one of the girls would have seen them cuff buttons," the young lady said, as she began in a businesslike way to go over the underwear nearest at hand. "It's a heavy week. Every-

body in this county always gets dirty at once." She went on laconically as she lifted one by one the pieces in the compartment. "There's that old shirt of Mr. Ritter's—ought to of been in the rag bag long ago. . . . That's Mr. Hawley's lot all together . . . and George Reifsnyder's. . . .

"What is it?"

"B. V. D.'s and two shirts, a pink and a white one—Gosh! He's getting mighty clean all of a sudden. . . . Here's a blue one—no, it ain't yours, Mr. Brock—other end of the county—Jim Fineshriber's. Most of our people wears white, like Mr. Slosson—There's a clean man for you—three shirts a week regular, starch fronts, too."

Piece by piece they went over the articles unsuccessfully, turning then to the piles that had emerged from the machines.

"It ain't any use looking," she said, "but there they are. You can see the blue ones plain enough—some of them's pyjamas."

"What's that?" Brock asked, as he spied a bluish shirt with white stripes.

"That—I don't know," she shook the shirt out and Brock took it eagerly from her hands examining the collar. It was slightly torn as though injured in the machinery.

"That's mighty careless. Must of got caught in something. Is that your shirt Mr. Brock? There's no cuff buttons in it."

"Whose is it?" he asked, trying to control his voice.

"I don't know. I'll have to look in the book. Three seventeen. Why do you want to know?"

"Well, it might be mine. It looks like it."

"I'll find out."

Instead of following her, he studied the collar of the shirt carefully. A small piece of the edge of the collar had been torn out and Brock knew where it was—caught on the hasp of the gold bar pin in Krouse's possession. There seemed little doubt about it. This was the shirt that had been worn by the man who had killed Merillat. Brock hurried through the door into the office. But here a shock awaited him.

"That shirt belongs to Mr. Israel Krouse of Laurel."

"Krouse! You're sure—"

"That's what the record shows. Mr. Israel Krouse. You know, son of Jonas Krouse, owns the Laurel Mountain House, lives out on the Lake Boulevard—"

"Lake Boulevard where the tar is—"

"I beg pardon—"

"Well, I'm much obliged," said Brock. "I—I—guess I've lost those cuff links. Sorry to have troubled you."

And, bewildered and excited, Brock hurried out of the office and down the street to tell the little man the astonishing fact just disclosed. He ran up the steps of the Court House and burst through the swing door of the county clerk's office where Krouse was writing in a notebook. The little man got up, catching immediately the contagion of Brock's excitement.

"Well—"

"I've found the blue shirt. The very shirt, I'm sure of it—"

"Sh—" Krouse got up and closed the inner door into the corridor. Then crossed the room swiftly to Brock's side. "Whose shirt?"

"Israel Krouse's—" Brock gasped. "Son of Jonas Krouse—"

Julius Krouse stared.

"Some more damned nutty business!" he gasped.

"I tell you it's a fact. They looked it up in the record book—"

"Nonsense! Dummer Kopf! Somebody's made a mistake." The little man sent his long arms whirling like a windmill. "Israel Krouse ain't got the spirit to kill a flea—"

"Well, there it is. Go and look at it yourself."

"Izzy's got black hair—jet black—what there is of it. He's a cousin of mine."

"I don't care if he's your grandmother. That's his shirt. And he lives on the Lake Boulevard, don't he?"

"Well, I'll be gosh-swizzled if he don't!" Krouse sank into his chair, folding his arms, slowly shaking his head as though he were trying to discover if its articulations were all correct. "It's dumm nonsense," he growled. "Somebody's made a mistake. I wouldn't believe Izzy killed nobody, if he came down here and swore to it on the Bible a'ready. He's just a big slob. He's afraid of his own shadow. His pop humors him —because he nearly now died of scarlet fever once—"

"Well, you can't get away from the fact that that's his shirt. And you can't get away from the tar on Holtzhauer's machine that Merillat ran out the Lake Boulevard."

"Yah. That's right. Tar on the Boulevard. But there's a whole lot of folks live around the Boulevard—"

"Yes. But the shirt," Brock insisted.

"Well, we got to see about the dummer Esel who made that mistake a'ready."

He was immovable. His long pointed jaw shot forward and his brows tangled, concealing his eyes. Dutch stubbornness, Brock thought. Mr. Krouse didn't hold opinions. His opinions held *him*. He had already formed a theory of the crime, already "suspicioned" some one, and not the force of dynamite would blast him from his position. Brock was disappointed in him. This was not the way the best regulated investigations were conducted.

"You got your way of inwestigating crime, Mr. Brock, I got mine. That ain't Izzy's shirt—"

"That could be easily proved—"

"Yah. I'm so sure it ain't Izzy's shirt I'm willing to risk, now, going to him and showing it—"

"And ruin every chance of—"

"No. We got the laundry still, Mr. Brock. When they come to count the list—"

"Well, if they're dumb enough to make one mistake, they're dumb enough to make another."

Krouse made no reply. He only squared his hat on his head, put his notebook in his pocket, and opened the door.

"Come," he said firmly, "we get that blue shirt and go see Izzy."

Rather disgusted at the whole affair Brock silently accompanied the detective to the laundry. Further subterfuge was, of course, impossible. That is, the use of Brock's supposititious sleeve links was abandoned. When the blue shirt was produced Brock told the girl, without explaining his real mission, there were reasons for believing that the blue shirt did not

belong to Israel Krouse and that the District Attorney of Northampton County wanted to know whom the shirt belonged to. It was an important matter, to be kept secret, and any talk about the shirt or about the visit would be dealt with severely. Mr. Krouse borrowed a newspaper and carefully wrapped the moist garment.

"You got the idea, Miss King. It's up to you. There's been, now, a mistake in somebody's laundry list. In a coupla days somebody wants to know who's got this blue shirt. Well, you don't tell 'em, a'ready. You phone me instead. Understand?"

The girl was very much mystified and a little frightened but she agreed to do as he commanded and the visitors departed for Laurel. "Size—about fifteen and a half," Krouse said, laconically, in the car. "Izzy would strangle in that."

Defeated by this announcement which indicated again the triumph of Mr. Krouse's stubborn convictions, Brock sat silent most of the way to Jonas Krouse's home, unwilling to admit that Krouse was right and eager to see this "big slob" whom he still considered as a potential killer.

They went into the drive at the Jonas Krouse place and stopped in front of a large frame house, with gables, dormers, and shingled excrescences growing upon it in every available spot. The upper sashes downstairs were of leaded glass in purple and yellow. There was a wide portico and as they drew up at the steps a massive young man, who had been reading a novel, hoisted himself from a rocking chair. He was knock-kneed and propelled himself with a shuffling motion. As Julius Krouse greeted him he waved a

fat hand and sagged slowly down the steps to the door of the flivver.

Was this the fleet-footed messenger of the night, the crafty desperado who could shoot as quickly as he could run? Brock smiled as his glance passed over the slothful behemoth. Krouse had aptly named him. He *was* a big slob.

"What size collar you wear, Izzy?" Krouse asked cheerfully.

The young man stared stupidly while his fat fingers sought his neck band.

"What's the joke, Julius?" he asked in a high tenor voice.

"Well, I got a bet with George Reifsnyder you don't wear over sixteen a'ready."

"Well, you lose," said the fat man with a sigh. "Seventeen."

Krouse unwrapped his package.

"Ever see this shirt before?" he asked. Izzy blinked and peered.

"What d'you take me for? A seed-house drummer?" he asked.

There was no misconstruing the blandness of his manner. Whatever Mr. Israel Krouse's physical deficiencies it was obvious that he was quite incapable of guile. After a few further pleasantries Julius Krouse drove on.

"Can you see Izzy doing a hundred yards in thirteen seconds, a'ready. Thirteen years maybe. . . ."

CHAPTER XI

SURPRISES

I

THE next morning's mail brought Brock a bulky envelope addressed by an unfamiliar hand. But the enclosure was written in a thin familiar script that aroused a sudden eagerness, for he knew that the letter was from Emile Trudeau. A sealed envelope was enclosed. He glanced at it and slipped it into his pocket, for it was addressed to Judith Kennedy.

His own letter was without date or place and began abruptly:

> I have read this morning in one of the New York newspapers a full account of the coroner's inquest at Laurel, and so I send this letter to your care, fearing that any letters sent direct to my niece might be intercepted. For the love of God do not fail me. My niece must receive the enclosed. It is vital to her well-being and happiness. I believe that you will do what I ask, because your testimony is in itself a proof that you have listened to the prayers of a desperate old man who did not know which way to turn for help.

Brock lowered the letter and stared out of his win-

dow frowning. Prayers? What prayers had he answered? The language was figurative perhaps.

He read on:

> The letters to Georges Merillat, read at the inquest, fortunately, revealed nothing as to my identity in the past. Perhaps, some day, you will know his story and mine. But not now—not until my death and this, I think, will not be long postponed. Judith must not know. You must never tell her even what I have already told you or what you suspect. It is more vital to her than it is to me that the murderer of Georges Merillat be permitted to go his way. So I remind you again, of your promises, though your testimony proves that you are still highly sensible of them—

Promises? Prayers Brock might have understood—but promises! What promises had he ever given Emile Trudeau? He remembered none. Promises about what? The context indicated that the promises were those of secrecy. This was like reading a serial story in a magazine with several installments missing. He tried to read between the lines and found a confirmation of his previous suspicions that the murderer of Georges Merillat had forced Emile Trudeau to go away under pain of a damaging revelation as to Trudeau's past. The dead man had left his heritage of blackmail to one even more unscrupulous than himself. Trudeau knew the murderer, of course, but his lips were sealed by fear—the same fear that had caused the payment of the twenty thousand dollars—now magnified by his own helplessness as a fugitive under suspicion of being concerned in a crime.

Brock read on:

It will be a waste of effort for them to search for me I have covered my tracks well. For the present, the secret I have lived all my life to conceal is still a secret—at least to the world. And the one man who knows it shall not find me alive. For I would rather a thousand times be dead, than under the threat that has robbed me of my peace and liberty and now hangs above the head of Judith Kennedy whom I love better than life itself. She will understand that and perhaps forgive me the sorrow I have brought upon her. You will meet her when you present the letter. Be kind to her, Mr. Brock. I think that I could die happily if I thought that you could care enough for her to protect her from the dangers of—

Here a few words had been blotted out and the last phrases written in a kind of desperation.

I cannot—dare not write more. She must take her chance. I wish that you—

The rest of the sentence sprawled unintelligibly ending in indecisions and was not finished. There was no signature. It seemed almost as though weakness or even death had intervened between the man and the thought he had wished so much to express and dared not.

What did it all mean? Brock puzzled over the problem and at last gave it up, putting the letter down and taking the sealed letter to Judith from his pocket and turning it over in his fingers. Judith Kennedy was in danger too—not the same sort of danger that had ter-

rorized Trudeau and sent him away a fugitive from justice, but one apparently as real and as menacing. The old man had asked Brock to be kind to her. He had not needed to be asked to do that, for already he had resolved to help her by the best of his knowledge and ability. But how could he protect her from a danger when he did not know what that danger was?

Did she know what threatened her? Was that danger related to the crime itself? Or was the thought of a danger to Judith only the emanation of a mind disordered by suffering? Brock did not know what to do. Should he let her see Trudeau's letter? No, that was impossible—a violation of confidence. . . . And as for speaking of these letters to Julius Krouse—the thought did not for a moment enter his mind.

He put the letters in his inside pocket and made his way to the Hawleys' house. Judith was at the breakfast table for she had passed a sleepless night and only rested toward dawn. But she came into the parlor greeting him with a smile until she saw the grave lines in his face.

"You're quite alone—"

"Yes. I—"

"This letter came for you to my care this morning," he said quietly handing it to her.

She took it eagerly, glancing at the handwriting and then looking up at him.

"He has written you?" she asked in a whisper.

"Nothing of moment. Absolutely nothing. No address. Perhaps he has given you—"

"Wait—wait, Mr. Brock." She tore her letter open. Some bills fell out.

He picked them up and handed them to her, whis-

pering. "No one must know that you have heard from him. It might place you in an awkward position."

"Yes, I understand," she gasped, already reading.

"Do you want me to go?" he asked.

"No. Please wait. Sit down while I read."

He obeyed. She went to the window and he could see the expressions of her face changing from eagerness to pity, fear, and disappointment. Her pallor was eloquent and her eyes were lustrous with her emotion. At last she turned to him.

"Do you know what he has written?"

"No. He only urged the importance of the letter reaching you safely."

"He seems to trust you, Mr. Brock," she said gently.

"I hope you'll let me be worthy of it."

She glanced around at him quickly.

"Then he did suggest to you that I might be in need of your help?"

"Only vaguely. I couldn't understand."

"This letter frightens me. He warns me to beware of those I least suspect—to trust no one except you. And it's all so vague. If he had only written clearly, poor dear. He seems to be trying to warn me against some threat that hangs over me—it almost seems like the same sort of a threat that hung over him. And yet it couldn't be that, for I have no money that any one could take. And there's no reason for me to fear any one." She broke off uncertainly. "Oh, what does it all mean? I'm not frightened exactly, but it's so strange, so mysterious. Do you think that the dreadful scene that he passed through could have made him unbalanced—mentally, I mean?"

"I don't think so. Does he say anything about the crime?"

"Nothing, except that he's innocent of it. He has sent me two thousand dollars," she said producing the bills. "He wants me to put the money in the bank, close Castle Rock and return to college. He gives me no address where I can write him but suggests that at some time in the future he will continue to communicate with me. He is still frightened, you see, and fears pursuit. Oh, if he would only let me go to him. I could always soothe him. It seems so dreadful not to be able to help him now when he has always been so helpful to me—"

"He has his reasons of course—"

"And as for going back to Bryn Mawr," she went on, apparently oblivious of his comment, "I couldn't do that. I couldn't study while I'm so unhappy about him. I want to help him to readjust himself. I want to find out—" she added, almost fiercely, "what this danger is that haunts him, that even haunts me who am innocent." She sank into a chair tensely. "I've got to find this enemy of his—I can't go away from Laurel without doing all in my power to solve the mystery and bring this intolerable situation to an end."

"There's only one solution of the mystery," said Brock quietly at last. "One person only can give it, and he is the man who killed Georges Merillat."

"Yes. I believe you. Well, I've got to try to find him. I've got to. I could never be happy the rest of my life if I knew I hadn't done everything I could to rescue Uncle Emile from this beast who has driven him into exile. Who can he be, Mr. Brock? Who could be so dastardly as to pursue a poor old man to

the very edge of the grave? The idea of such a person is inconceivable to me. What can he look like? It doesn't seem to me as if he could have a human form—"

"Yet he has. Mr. Krouse already suspects—"

"Whom?"

There was a step in the hall and young Bill Mallory stood in the doorway smiling.

"The outer door was open, Judith, so I just walked in," he said. "I hope I haven't intruded. How are you, Brock?"

Brock got up and nodded, but he was provoked by the young man's sudden appearance. Miss Kennedy nervously gathered her letter and bills and put them in her blouse.

"Mr. Brock and I were just talking over the—the inquest—" she said slowly.

"Some mystery! Say! They ought to get a real detective up here if they want to find out anything. I could find out myself more in five minutes than those birds can or will. Anybody who reads good detective stories could. Old Doc Burlingame!" Mallory laughed. "Why, Doc couldn't earn a living around here practicing medicine, so they made him coroner. And Julius Krouse—nothing but a quill driver in the Court House."

Brock hadn't been deeply impressed by Billy Mallory at the inquest. He was too self-assured even to be amusing. But Judith Kennedy seemed to be under the spell of her long friendship with the man.

"I just stopped by, Judith," he went on, "to see if you wouldn't like to take a ride down Northampton way. I've got to be going down to the bank."

"I'm afraid I can't this morning, Billy. I don't feel like doing much of anything yet."

"Oh, of course. I just thought it might be good for you to get out in the air." He glanced at Brock, frowned, then turned toward the door. "Funny business about that glove, Brock," he said laughing. "Imagine old Doc thinking *you* had anything to do with the murder! You ought to sue 'em for libel. And then that alibi—made you feel kind of funny—didn't it?"

Brock made no reply. There were circumstances surrounding his connection with the Castle Rock case that made these comments far from amusing.

"Lucky my hand was too big for that glove," Mallory went on, with a grin, "or they might have taken *me* for the murderer! Well, so long, Judith. Sorry you can't go. To-morrow maybe."

His departure left on Brock's mind an unpleasant impression of intrusive curiosity and ironical amusement. He was one of Judith Kennedy's oldest friends and this perhaps made her tolerant of his small-town cocksureness. Brock decided now that he didn't like the fellow and shouldn't care if Mallory knew it.

"It almost seems as if Billy was right, Mr. Brock. I can't believe there's the slightest chance of this Julius Krouse finding out anything. I want so much to help," she added. "Can't I do anything?"

"Yes, I think you can. You said something awhile ago that has set me thinking—that your uncle warned you to beware of those you least suspect. That's important. Anything is important that comes from Emile Trudeau."

"But that warning is so strange. It seemed to me that he wanted to tell me and did not dare."

"That's true. He doesn't dare. He can't tell—for if he did—"

Brock paused aware that he was perilously near betraying Emile Trudeau.

"If he did—?" she asked.

"Well—" he said lamely, "he would be obliged to—to tell something that he wishes to remain a secret. He is under some moral obligation—or some oath—"

"What oath could matter in a case like this?"

"Emile Trudeau is the only judge of that. But I'm not under an oath nor are you. And you've got to try and help Julius Krouse by interpreting if you can that strange warning against those you least suspect."

"I can't suspect any one among my friends—Billy Mallory, Archie McDermott, George Reifsnyder, Tom Hawley, Israel Krouse, Bertrand Daumier—the idea is fantastic."

"These are the names that occurred to you as you read that phrase—"

"Of course—my most intimate friends. But there are others I've known since childhood—Abner Watrous, Joe Milligan, Henry Bartol—but the thought of connecting these names with the crime is just as absurd. . . ."

Brock was thoughful for a moment.

"Your uncle seems to put some faith in me," he said at last with a smile. "Wouldn't it be wise for you to put yourself unreservedly in my hands?"

"Willingly. I—I do trust you—the more so as my uncle wishes me to," she said quietly.

"Then, don't you think it would be wiser while you remain in Laurel to accept my Aunt Julia's invitation to come and stay at her house?"

She was silent a moment.

"You fear then, that something might happen to me here?"

"No. But you've had a warning. It would be foolish not to heed it. To speak of your uncle's letter for instance—"

"On the contrary, wouldn't I be more useful where I can be prepared for the unguarded moments of those I've been warned against?"

"You don't want to come to Mrs. Magruder's?"

"I owe you too much already."

"Won't you let me be the judge of that?"

"Well, I'll think about it," she said with a smile. Brock had risen. There were many things he would have liked to talk about, Emile Trudeau's letter, the characters of the friends she had mentioned and their previous relationships with herself and Emile Trudeau. But he felt that the moment was not propitious. He felt that she liked him and had been drawn toward him from the first moment of shock and dependence. But if her letter from Emile Trudeau had been as definite in its injunction to friendship as his had been, he could understand her reservations. She did not want to be thrown at any man's head. This was how he read her attitude. It explained perhaps her reasons for not letting him know the entire contents of Emile Trudeau's letter.

Brock went on into the village where he proposed to spend the rest of the morning asking questions that might bring some light into the darkness. At the corner of the street he met Archie McDermott and they went on together. This was one of Judith Kennedy's friends that Brock had put on his list of "sus-

pects." But he had to admit to himself as they talked of the crime that any suspicion he may have had was far from justifiable. He was, like Judith, a stripe above the "dumm Dutchies" of Laurel and vicinity, could talk with the intelligence of the college graduate, had seen something of the world, and used a vernacular quite free of the "a'readys" and "yets" which characterized the native Laurellians. Funny though, his wearing a blue shirt that morning with a white stripe in it.

2

Brock had reached a point in his investigations where he was ready to suspect any person in Laurel of having some connection with the crime. He would have given a great deal to know whom Krouse had "suspicioned." The little man was moving mysteriously between Laurel and Northampton but he had not called on Brock for his help again nor had he told what he was doing. Brock had decided that Krouse's methods were too deliberate for him and had formulated a plan of his own that he hoped would achieve some immediate results—a plan to disregard the advice of Julius Krouse and keep a personal watch on the ex-Pullman porter, Thomas Jefferson Johnson. For with Trudeau missing and an investigation of Daumier still problematical, the negro servant provided what seemed the best opportunity for something immediate in the way of information. For Brock was sure that Johnson knew, if not who committed the crime, something more about what had happened at Castle Rock than he had dared to tell. The man had been frightened and sullen and his attitude toward Brock seemed more pe-

culiar in the perspective of the few days that had elapsed since the morning of the eighteenth of April when the crime had been discovered. Julius Krouse had not wished to alarm the man and was holding him as a kind of trump card to play only when other evidence warranted it. But this policy of inaction was less suited to the patience of Brock, who was convinced that they were missing an opportunity in not watching the colored man at night during the hours when he was away from Castle Rock at the house of his friend in Laurel, a colored man who was employed as a janitor and porter at the Laurel Mountain House. The place was a clapboard affair on the Laurelton road at the outskirts of the village. Brock had strolled out in that direction during the daytime when Johnson was at Castle Rock and had devised a plan to watch the place from the vantage of a patch of bushes at the edge of the woods just across the road. This he could approach by making a detour from the Northampton road which passed to the southward.

Accordingly, after supper each evening he told Mrs. Magruder that he was going out for his usual evening stroll and the weather being fine, managed to reach his post just at dusk without being observed either from the village or from the nearest farmhouse, several hundred yards beyond. The place, it seemed, was a sort of evening resort for the colored people of Laurel who came and went throughout the evening. There was a game of some sort in progress within the house, cards or craps, but the shades were drawn and the sounds of voices and laughter were the only indications of activity within.

It was a lonely and uninteresting vigil and for three

nights Brock sat crouched on a fallen tree until after eleven when the lights were put out, very bored, rather chilly, and convinced at the last that the game wasn't worth the discomfort. He recognized the slouchy figure of Johnson as he came out on the little porch and sat for a while before going to bed, envying the man his cigar and his comfortable chair. Once Johnson went to the village and Brock followed discreetly, but as his visits were only to the drug or tobacco stores he only had his labor for his pains.

Still Brock persisted, returning to his post of observation night after night, very much discouraged at his failure but still confident that if Johnson was to make a move that would betray any complicity in the murder he would do it in the hours of the night when he thought he would be unobserved. That Brock's opinion was shared was shown on the fourth night when Officer Coales slowly approached the house from the direction of the village, went silently on the little porch, and peered through the slit of light below the window shade. And later, though the night was very dark, Brock thought he saw the slender figure of Julius Krouse himself prowling around the place. But he did not reveal his plans or his hiding place to the little man when they met the next day, for Krouse had suddenly become very reticent and refused even to tell what he was doing, only speaking vaguely, as he had done once before, of the proposed visit to New York. Brock had lost no confidence in Krouse's judgment, however, and the postponement of the New York visit seemed a clear indication that Krouse believed that the man he "suspicioned" still remained in Laurel or Northampton, where he could keep an eye on his pur-

suers until he was sure that they were off the scent.

This theory was reasonable and gave Brock a greater patience for his task. The sixth night was foggy with a spatter of rain coming out of the mist now and then from Laurel Mountain. The fog was so thick that the light from the house Brock watched was a pale blur in the darkness. Eleven o'clock came, and the guests departed, colored men and women whose voices came to him quite clearly. The light upstairs appeared and disappeared but the one on the lower floor was not extinguished. When a figure emerged from the door Brock saw the glow of a match on the porch as Johnson lighted his cigar and heard him cough, as he paced slowly up and down. He noted too that Johnson had his cap on as though prepared to go out. But he did not go away from the porch and as the moments passed and the glow of the cigar came and went Brock became convinced that Johnson was waiting for some one.

The road was deserted and the mist growing denser, but as the man still lingered on the porch after he had thrown away the end of his cigar, Brock was hopeful that his own long vigil was to be rewarded. It was chilly, so he pulled his raincoat about him, straightening and peering through the bushes. At last a dim shape appeared against the white mist that hung in the road growing larger and then merging into the obscurity near by. Johnson stood silent in the shadows until the pedestrian stopped opposite the porch when he came out and joined the other man. No words were spoken, at least none that Brock could hear, and the two men moved back together into the darkness from which the stranger had come. Brock's eyes had grown accus-

tomed to the night but the distance was too great to distinguish the face of the visitor, who wore what appeared to be a light gray overcoat and a slouch hat pushed down over his eyes. He heard the mumble of the men's voices as they walked but could hear no word. It was a difficult situation. Two plans suggested themselves, one to pull down the brim of his hat and walk boldly along the road, hoping in overtaking the men to catch a glimpse of the face of the stranger or a chance phrase as he passed them; the other to follow silently along the edge of the wood trusting to the darkness, the shadows of the wood and whatever cover he could find. He chose the latter alternative—hoping that he could creep near enough to overhear their conversation.

So he went rapidly for a few paces along the turf by the roadside making no sound and sure, until he came in sight of the pair, that he was as safe from observation as they were from him. But when he made out the loom of their figures again the task became more difficult. He had the advantage that they were to be seen against the sky over the meadow to the right, while the woods at the left were behind him. He had purposely worn his dark raincoat so that he could not be seen among the bushes and unless he came into the open they would not see him. For a moment he thought of striking into the woods, coming into the road again beyond them, but he feared the sound of his footsteps among the dead leaves and branches. So he went on slowly where he took to the road, more rapidly when he could find cover. And all the while the mumble of their conversation came to him but too distant to be understood. He could see now that the

stranger was taller than Johnson, almost six feet, with broad shoulders and that he had the easy stride of youth. Presently when they reached a crossroad Johnson and his companion stopped.

The place was badly chosen for Brock's purpose for he was in the open, away from the woods, with only one small patch of bushes at the edge of the fence. This was across the road from where Brock had paused and to reach it he would be obliged to show his figure outlined against the sky towards the village. So instead of crossing at once he went quickly back the way he had come until he could see the figures no more; then he crossed the road, climbed the fence into the meadow and moving from one panel of the fence to the other stealthily approached the pair. He reached the bushes where he had hoped to conceal himself, but even here he could hear little of what the men were saying and two panels of the fence were down so that he could go no nearer without being seen.

So he crouched and listened. The back of the stranger was toward him, but at last he managed to hear a phrase of the colored man's. It was something about the "risks that he ran." Brock prayed for superhearing and at last was rewarded by Johnson's voice raised in a kind of petulant sullenness.

"Well, I knows what I knows. . . ."

The stranger seemed to gain stature.

"So do I know. . . . You'll hang unless you agree. A thousand more and that's the last."

It was a hoarse voice, one that Brock could not identify.

There was an argument, a whine from Johnson, pleading rather than threatening. The colored man

was frightened but his desperation was fighting against his fears. He said something that Brock could not hear but he heard the stranger's reply. "Not a dollar more. . . . I'm through. . . . Nobody . . . believes you . . . away from here that night. I can prove it."

And then to the listener's astounded ears, "Brock knows what's good for him. You'd better too. He's in as bad shape as you are." And then with sudden tenseness— "So you keep your black mouth shut too, or by God. . . ."

The threat was uttered in a hoarse whisper, accompanied by a sudden gesture and the colored man staggered back. Brock imagined that he could see Johnson's yellow eyeballs gleaming.

There was a silence followed by a question from the stranger.

"Well, I reckon . . . do what you wants. When will I get . . . ?"

"All right . . . stay here now. Nothing . . . afraid of. Money—small bills—you'll know where they come from. . . ."

The man straightened and turned into the road making a gesture toward the village that Johnson obeyed. Brock had heard enough of the conversation to realize that here at his very elbow was the man Krouse sought. He cursed the night for its darkness which hid the man's face, forgetting that except for the fog he would never have succeeding in reaching his post of observation. Without another word the men separated, Johnson starting silently toward the village, the stranger down the crossroad.

Brock was just on the point of congratulating himself upon the result of his adventure for he hoped to

follow the man wherever he went and see him under the first light they came to. But the unexpected happened. His long vigil in the wet had chilled him through and through and even the glow of interest in the adventure had failed to warm him. He sneezed. It was not a loud sneeze but the sound was quite audible for a hundred feet in all directions and it produced immediate results, for the stranger stopped for a moment, while his weapon streamed fire, the bullets cutting the brush all around the crouching eavesdropper, but fortunately not striking him. Brock leaped past the bushes toward his man, who had run in close to the fence and was running away. Brock had lost the man once before by his hesitation and timidity so he took a shot at the fleeing shadow, then rose from his place of concealment and peered around the corner of the fence, searching for his adversary who was perhaps waiting for a chance of a sure shot as he emerged. But as Brock stood up, he was aware of a presence near him, had a glimpse of Johnson's distended eyeballs, when something struck him on the head and he tumbled, half conscious, in a heap on the ground.

CHAPTER XII

THE REVOLVER

DIMLY, Brock was aware of rushing feet, of shots fired, the sounds of voices and then as he returned to full consciousness, of a familiar voice speaking close to his ear.

"He's coming around. Maybe he'll be able to walk in a minute a'ready."

The long face of Julius Krouse like a vision in an evil dream appeared out of the fog. Brock sat up trying to find words.

"He was here—just now," he gasped.

"Who was here?"

"The man—who killed Merillat. I'd have got him if—" Brock tried to remember why he hadn't got him.

"So," Krouse said dryly. "You'd have got him if Johnson hadn't got you."

"Johnson—yes, it was Johnson. Where is he—?"

"We got him—here."

Brock turned his head painfully upward. There was Johnson handcuffed to Officer Coales who stood awaiting Brock's recovery.

"What for kind of a damn fool you make of yourself this time, Brock? He didn't shoot you anywheres, did he?"

Brock ruefully moved his arms and legs reaching the satisfactory conclusion that he was quite whole.

"I'd have found out who he was—if I hadn't—sneezed," he gasped painfully.

"Yah. If the dog hadn't stopped to scratch a flea, he'd of caught the rabbit," Krouse said dryly. "Feeling better now?"

There was solicitude in his tone and Brock was grateful for it.

"I'm all right." He struggled to his feet and leaned against the fence.

"How did you happen to get here?" he asked.

"Oh! I was just snoopin' around a little. We saw the light in the place where Johnson is staying and the door open, so we came out the road a piece. Then we heard the shooting. Mighty lucky for you we did, young fella."

"Well, I'm much obliged," Brock gasped wearily. "I guess they'd have gotten me if you hadn't come along. Did you see the other man?"

"No. It didn't take him long to disappear in the fog. But we got Johnson, all right."

The negro raised his head.

"What right you got to arres' me?" he asked with a challenging air. "Any man got a right to meet a friend and talk—"

"Well. We'll just hold you for the assault on Mr. Brock."

Johnson gave a spurious laugh.

"Now that's funny. How'd I know it was Mr. Brock? I jes saw a man raise up at me out of the bushes. An' natchelly thought he was goin' to 'sault *me*. You can't hold me for defendin' myself—"

"Well, you watch us and see what we do," replied

Krouse dryly. "How about it, Mr. Brock? Can you walk a little?"

"Yes. I—I think so."

They went slowly back to the village lockup, the silent Officer Coales with the prisoner leading the way. Brock felt sick and his head was thumping as though with reverberations of the blow Johnson had given him, but he was so eager to tell Krouse his story that he managed to keep going beside the little man.

"Who was it?" Krouse asked in a lowered tone.

"I couldn't tell. His back was turned most of the time. He was a big man in a gray overcoat."

"Yah."

"You know?"

"I got ideas. Did you hear what they said?"

Brock managed to tell the substance of what he had overheard.

"Money," muttered Krouse. "I thought so. That's the way with blackmail. It strings along more and more. Johnson tried to hold him up. I told you now, Johnson knew. But I wasn't ready to use Johnson yet. You went and spoiled my plans a'ready, Mr. Brock."

"I don't see—"

"Well, we got different ways of working, you and me."

"But surely you're going to sweat Johnson!"

"Yah. We'll let John Corson do that in a coupla days when Johnson sits in the lockup awhile." Krouse gave a chuckle. "I thought you were foolish sitting out there in the wet night after night, but I guess we learned something."

"You knew I was there—all the while?" Brock asked in amazement.

"Yah. You got to have eyes in all sides of your head in a case like this."

With the protesting Johnson safe in the lockup Krouse got out the trusty flivver and took Brock home.

"I guess you better rest up, Mr. Brock. I'm asking you to go to New York with me to-morrow maybe."

"Have you found a lead?"

"I'll talk to you about that to-morrow. We got to work fast now. Our man won't be staying around here much longer."

Bewildered by Krouse's air of conviction, and too weary to ask further questions, Brock went into the house and upstairs to bed. There was a lump on the back of his head where he had struck the fence rail and a black and blue mark on the side of his face from Johnson's fist, but he bathed his wounds and slept, awaking with a slight headache but otherwise not worse from his encounter. He was aware that except for the timely intervention of Mr. Krouse and Officer Coales, another killing might have been added to Northampton County's criminal record. For his glimpse of the unknown man in the fog, and the conversation that he had overheard had convinced him that the murderer was clever and desperate enough at this close pursuit, to kill whoever threatened his freedom. But try as he would Brock could not identify either the man's figure or his voice with any person in Laurel on the list of suspects. Mr. Krouse's air of assurance, therefore, was mystifying to him. He knew that no amount of questioning would bring a satisfactory response from the little man, who, as he had repeatedly stated, had his own ideas of conducting a murder investigation, and these he refused to share with

Brock. The visit to New York, mentioned last night, seemed to Brock the wildest kind of a goose chase, but after breakfast Brock packed a bag and informed his Aunt Julia of the prospective journey. She was much dismayed.

"Just when you were beginning to get the advantage of your rest cure!" she exclaimed. "I've no patience with you, Joe. Why do you have to go messing in other people's affairs? Let Julius Krouse alone. You'll be having another breakdown the first thing you know."

Brock laughed.

"I'm feeling fine. I've gotten mixed up in this thing and I've got to go through with it. I can't tell you about it, Aunt Julia, but it's a question of honor with me—for Trudeau's sake and Judith Kennedy's."

"Ah, I see. Judith—"

He grinned at her.

"Now don't you go jumping at conclusions. There are reasons why I've got to help Krouse. He says he needs me. And Judith Kennedy relies on me. Then, you see, it's the interest in this murder mystery that has made me forget I've ever been sick. I tell you it's doing me good. I haven't thought of my book for a week."

"You Brocks always *would* have your own way," said Mrs. Magruder with a sigh.

"I won't be gone long—only a week or so."

"Well—if you're set on it." And then more cheerfully, "It will give me a chance to give this room a good house cleaning. I've been wanting to get into that closet for weeks."

"Well, help yourself."

The homely instincts of his aunt awoke to immediate activity. She crossed the room eagerly and began pulling her nephew's clothing out and examining it.

"Pockets full of all kinds of rubbish, I guess. You writers! Now, this old shooting jacket! It's a disgrace even for Laurel. You won't need it any more this spring. You ought to throw it away or burn it." She took the garment and held it out with both hands. "My! but it's heavy! What have you got in the pockets?"

"Just a lot of cartridges."

"Cartridges!" She thrust her hand into one of the capacious pockets and slowly brought forth, to his amazement, a revolver. . . . "What were you doing with this?"

Brock stared at the thing, unable, for a moment, to speak. Then he took the weapon from her fingers.

"I don't know," he muttered. "I never saw it before."

But there was in his voice a note that disturbed her.

"You never saw it before!"

"No, never."

"Then how did it get here?"

"I don't know." He broke the barrel and examined the cartridges in the cylinder. There were five loaded cartridges, but one had been discharged. Mrs. Magruder could not understand the sudden pallor that came into his face, for he was staring in a kind of terror at the nickel tips of the bullets.

"What is it, Joe? You look sick."

"Good God!" He sank upon the side of the bed, holding the broken weapon stupidly in listless fingers.

"Tell me, Joe. . . ."

"It's the gun that killed Merillat," he gasped.

"Impossible."

"I tell you, it *is*. Look!" he said excitedly. "See. There are stains on it. Blood. . . ."

"Stop talking foolishly. I won't have it. You're letting your imagination—"

"I know what I'm talking about," he said tensely. "Merillat drew this gun, shot at the murderer, and missed. Then he was disarmed and beaten over the head with it."

"How do you know that?"

"I'm just picturing the scene. Krouse has been hunting everywhere for this revolver."

"This revolver—nonsense. . . ."

"*This* revolver," he said firmly. "There's no other like it in this part of the country. It's French. And the bullets—Krouse found the nickel-headed bullet from this empty cartridge in the wainscoting of Trudeau's library."

"But how did it get here—in your pocket?"

"God knows." Brock spun the cylinder of the weapon and snapped the barrel into alignment.

"What do you mean . . . God knows? Don't talk in riddles," she exclaimed, now as perturbed as he. "Either you put it there or you didn't put it there."

"I didn't put it there," he said helplessly. "I never saw the thing before."

"Then somebody else did—"

He started up from the bed, his eyes suddenly alight with the thought that she had suggested.

"Somebody else—yes—somebody else. They came and put it there. A plant—"

"A plant—? You mean so that it would look as though you'd committed the murder?"

"Yes, yes," he protested. "The man who killed Merillat came up here when the house was empty and put the gun in my coat pocket so that the evidence would point to me. There's no other explanation."

"How could any one come up here without my knowing it?" said Mrs. Magruder indignantly.

"When you go to market and I'm out somewhere. You do leave the door unlatched sometimes."

"Impossible!"

"Well, that's the only way it could have gotten here," he muttered.

He did not hear what she said after that, for his thoughts had flown to the series of incidents which connected him so intimately with the crime. *Penguin Island,* the broken marred thumb print, the statement by the man in the fog last night that Brock "knew what was good for him," Johnson's exclamation, the warning "the goods are on you." . . . This was what the words of the message had meant by the "goods" being "on him," this gun of Merillat's with the stains of his blood upon it. He took it up and examined it carefully again. There was no doubt about the blood stains on the barrel and on the butt—or that this was the weapon that Krouse had been searching for, the implement that had crushed the Frenchman's head—a weapon quite heavy enough for that. . . . Mrs. Magruder's voice came to him again in definite, arresting statement.

"They're trying to put the crime on you, Joe. Well, they can't. Because I know where you were all that night—up here, in this room, in bed. I saw you come

up here after you went out walking along Laurel Mountain. You were dead tired and went to bed with your clothes on. Nobody could have come up here unless—" She paused and a startled look came into her eyes, "unless they could have sneaked up when I fell asleep in my chair. I *did* fall asleep that night, Joe, in my chair reading, but I didn't tell them that at the inquest —because it was just a little while. And nobody could have come in, I'd have wakened in a minute. I did go up and turn out your light and there you were, sound asleep—"

"What time was that?" he asked, listlessly.

"Around eleven thirty, I guess. . . ."

Brock had put his head into his hands and sat trying to think about the meaning of this strange discovery. A plant, of course. But how had the revolver been put into the pocket of his shooting jacket without any one in the house knowing about it? Here was a diabolical cleverness that outdid anything yet accomplished by the murderer. For a moment of further bewilderment Brock forgot all the other evidence that Julius Krouse had collected which so definitely indicated another man and realized that the accusing finger of the law was pointing at him as the actual perpetrator of the crime. If he were any other person than himself, he knew that the evidence would be incontestable—and even being himself he could not be sure that the revolver could have been placed in the shooting jacket by the person who wished to incriminate him. An intrusion on the night of the murder seemed scarcely probable, scarcely possible, by a man who had just committed a crime and was seeking to hide himself as quickly as he could. And the old shooting jacket had

hung, as it was found on its hook, undisturbed since he had worn it last—on the night when the murder had been committed. That, in itself, was a harrowing thought. He had not worn it since that night. It almost seemed as though the same fate that now directed all this evidence against him had driven the thought of the shooting jacket from his mind that he might not know it. But there it was, in his Aunt Julia's hand, freed of its damnable evidence, an innocent garment again, while the revolver. . . .

He rose at last, at the point of a resolution.

"I've got to tell Julius Krouse about all this," he said slowly.

"Julius Krouse! And have him go putting you in jail for murder!"

Aunt Julia breathed the words in horror appalled at her own meaning.

"I've got to tell him, whatever happens. I can't drag you into this thing. You've seen the gun, you can't shield me."

"Well, I've got to shield you if you won't shield yourself. You're crazy, Joe. All this excitement has gone to your head."

"All right, I'm crazy then. But I've just got sense enough left to know that it's better to give the gun up than to have Julius Krouse find it here in your house."

"He'll never find it," she said, in a whisper. "No one shall ever find it. I'll bury it in the garden tonight. If that's helping hide the evidence of the crime I don't care. I'm not going to let you tell about this revolver. Why Joe, don't you see they *might*—they *might* bring you to trial—they might even find enough evidence to condemn you." Aunt Julia was frightened

now, more frightened even than he was. The small loophole that she had found in what she had considered an impregnable alibi as to her knowledge of his whereabouts on the night of the crime had made her suddenly aware of the dreadful possibilities that might lie before him. She was so frightened that she steadied him. With a laugh, he rose.

"Well, of course, I didn't kill Merillat and I don't know anything about how that gun came into my pocket. And I've nothing to be frightened about. I'll admit I'm puzzled. Who wouldn't be? Julius Krouse said this case was 'kind of nutty.' It is—so nutty that I'm almost ready to believe I've gone nutty too. But it's funny too when you think of it. I start out to investigate a crime and most of the evidence points to *me* as the murderer—"

"I told you to have nothing more to do with it."

"Well, you see, I've got to go on now to clear myself. Julius Krouse is coming here this morning to tell me about the New York visit. I'm going to show him this revolver and tell him how you found it."

"Joe!" his aunt exclaimed in a kind of terror. There was a sound of an arriving car. Brock went to the window.

"Here's Krouse now. I'm not going to play this game underhanded. He's got to know. I've got to trust to his knowledge of human nature and his intelligence."

"Julius Krouse's intelligence! You're lost, Joe."

As the front door bell rang she put her arms around her nephew, whispering again—

"There's still time, Joe. Let me have the revolver. He'll never see it—never know—"

Brock kissed her and put her aside gently.

"No, Aunt Julia. It can't be done. Just go down to the door, will you, and send him up here?"

"You insist . . . ?"

"I've got to—to tell him everything."

The door bell clanged again. Mrs. Magruder turned slowly and, without speaking again, went down to let Julius Krouse in.

The little man came up the stairs tripping like a child and Brock greeted him on the landing.

"Well, how you feel this morning a'ready? H-m! You look kind of white. That knock on the fence rail must have now, jarred you more than you thought."

"Sit down, Mr. Krouse. I'm all right. I've just had a sort of a surprise."

"Maybe you ain't up to going down to New York—"

"I've got something to tell you before we talk about that—"

"Something to do with the Merillat case?" he asked quickly.

Brock nodded. "I've found the weapon that killed the Frenchman."

Krouse leaped to his feet as Brock brought the revolver from the table where he had put it. The detective took it from his hand, broke the barrel quickly and examined the contents of the chambers.

"By golly, that's the gun all right. H-m. Blood stains and all. Where did you find it?"

Brock struggled for the words of his momentous reply, aware of his Aunt Julia, pale and troubled, standing in the open doorway. Yet at last the words came simply enough.

"In the pocket of my own shooting jacket," he said quietly.

Krouse stared at Brock for a moment, glanced at the frightened face of Mrs. Magruder and then did an astonishing thing. He burst suddenly into laughter. It didn't sound like pleasant laughter to Brock for it had an ironic ring. He had heard Krouse's laughter before and it always had betokened a kind of glee that Brock could not understand. Yet somehow, it gave him courage.

"I wonder why I never thought of that a'ready," Krouse said with a frown when his mirth was under control.

Brock stared at him in amazement.

"How could you have thought of it when I never even thought of it myself!"

"Seems kind of nutty, ain't?"

"Good God! Mr. Krouse. It's nothing to laugh about. My shooting jacket has been hanging there in the closet. I haven't worn it since the afternoon before the murder. My aunt just took it out of the closet and found the gun in the right-hand pocket. I don't know how long it's been there. But there it is. I didn't put it there. I have no recollection of it whatever. I never saw it before to-day."

Mr. Krouse began laughing again.

"And you don't know how it got there?"

"No. Unless the man who killed Merillat came into this house and put it there."

"Why?"

"A plant—to fasten the crime on me."

Krouse grinned. "Hoping I'd come, now, to your closet and find it a'ready? Sounds kind of foolish,

ain't? Didn't I tell you I haven't suspicioned you, Mr. Brock?"

"Well, you've got every right to suspect me now. I had to tell you."

Krouse's amusement continued.

"Well, how about the blue-shirt fella that shoots at you in the dark?"

"You mean, you don't consider this evidence circumstantial?"

"Never you mind what I mean. I ain't arresting you, am I?"

"Then you believe this gun in my pocket is a plant?"

"I'm not saying what I believe, not now, a'ready. I got my ideas. I'll just take this gun, I'll need it at the trial. I'm thinking of going, now, to New York on the four-thirty from Northampton. Can you go with me?"

Brock gasped his relief and amazement. There were deep recesses in the little man's brain that could only be explored when he intended them to be.

"I guess I can go," Brock muttered. "My bag was packed before we found that revolver."

"Well, you be sure and put your dress suit in your bag. I got to go now and meet John Corson to make a preliminary examination of Johnson. I'll be here for you at three, ain't?"

"Won't you come back for dinner, Mr. Krouse?" said Mrs. Magruder, now smiling with her best "party" manner. "We'll have it any time you say."

CHAPTER XIII

THE HOTEL MAUPIN

I

THIS extraordinary interview left Brock rather light-headed, for before Krouse's arrival he had felt weighed down by the sense of the extraordinary circumstances connecting him with the crime. Now he didn't know whether to laugh, like Mr. Krouse, at the irony of his position as an investigator of a crime that he seemed himself to have committed; or to beat his breast like the ancients when circumstances were beyond their control. The convictions of the little man were so positive that not even this definite and appalling evidence against Brock had made the slightest difference in his point of view. He had his ideas a'ready. He "suspicioned" somebody else. Even if Brock had confessed the crime doubtless he would not have believed him. Of course Brock could not confess the crime, since he knew that he had not committed it, but the weight of evidence had been piled item by item against him so that he was almost ready to believe that even if he had not committed the crime he ought at least to know something more about it. There was no reason in Krouse's stubborn way of ignoring the evidence of the revolver in Brock's shooting jacket. In nine cases out of ten such a damning fact would be enough to warrant immediate arrest and imprisonment pending a further investigation. And yet instead of the arrest and imprisonment

that Mrs. Magruder had expected, here was Brock invited to accompany this strange detective to New York in search of clues to fasten the crime upon the other man. It was to laugh. There was nothing else to do.

Julius Krouse was no Sherlock Holmes. He had no scientific or other attainments. He was only half educated, almost uneducated in every sense except what seemed to be most important in the mystery of Castle Rock, a genius for the essential detail and a shrewd common sense that seemed to be more useful than all the book learning in the world. Brock felt sure that if he had needed science or book learning to help him in his quest he would have had the breadth of mind to seek it. But for the present he seemed sufficient unto himself and in the rejection of the evidence of the revolver seemed to have called upon his sixth sense to guide him on the right path. As Brock thought about the interview, he seemed to become aware of a new assurance in Krouse's manner, a prescience not born so much from a conviction based on shrewd guesswork as from a knowledge of facts of which Brock was ignorant. Brock experienced again the sensation that he was a child at the beck of destiny, a child too in the hands of this strange little man who looked like a cigar-store Indian and talked like Weber and Fields. He found himself indignant again as he had been before, at the manner in which Julius Krouse totally ignored his opinions and the startling evidence against himself that he had felt it his duty to give.

Brock found it curious that he still wanted to argue with Krouse that the evidence against him was overwhelming and that the little man had no right so summarily to disregard it. The little man knew something,

Brock was sure, that would explain the presence of the pistol in the pocket of the shooting jacket. But what? What did he know that could possibly explain it? Nothing could explain it, unless Brock had put it there, and this, he knew, he had not done. And then the footprints, the footprints of his own walking shoes on Trudeau's lawn that matched the ones in his Aunt Julia's driveway—they too were damning. . . . The whole affair was most extraordinary, baffling to the most imaginative intelligence. And yet Julius Krouse no longer seemed to be baffled. He was moving now with a confidence he had not shown before. A light of some sort had come to him, that seemed to shine in places that continued to be dark to Brock. It seemed, too, that Krouse must know exactly what he intended to do when they reached New York—to open up a new line of investigation that would point definitely to the man they were seeking.

Brock gave the problem up. It was all, as he admitted to his astonished Aunt Julia, too much for his simple peasant soul. Julius Krouse was master of the situation and of them. Brock figuratively threw up his hands and proclaimed himself the obedient apostle. He would do, like a child, whatever Julius Krouse told him to do.

In the meanwhile, before Mr. Krouse's return, he thought it wise to visit Judith Kennedy and tell her of their plans. He had seen her from day to day at brief moments but had told her nothing of his nightly watch on Johnson or of the projected visit to New York. Indeed their conversations had been much devoted to Trudeau, to her own plans, and at times to their own friendly relationship. He decided now that it would

be wise to let her know all that had happened including the encounter in the fog and the discovery of Merillat's revolver in his own shooting jacket. For these things would warn her that it was no ordinary man with whom they had to deal.

She listened, very much disturbed at the part the negro Johnson had taken in the night affair, for she had known the servant for years and had believed in him. Here again, it seemed that her friends were not to be relied upon. And when she learned that this new friend that she had made was going away from Laurel, denying her the support of his presence and advice, she seemed suddenly to lose her courage.

"I don't know what to do," she said, when he had finished. "That letter from Uncle Emile has frightened me more than I've admitted. I—I—" she hesitated a moment and then rather wistfully, "do you think Mr. Krouse would mind," she asked, "if I would go to New York too? I—I might be able to help in some way. And then, besides there's the chance of my being able to find Uncle Emile."

"If you want to go," he replied delightedly, "I don't see what Julius Krouse has to do with it."

"I could go to the Pendennis. I've been there often. And then you could keep in touch with me and tell me what you're doing."

"Splendid. We're leaving Northampton at four-thirty," he said, at the door.

"I'll come to-morrow. I couldn't get ready to-day."

"I suppose you know," he said earnestly, "that it makes me happier to know that you still rely upon me."

She made no reply to that except to give him a bright glance as he went out.

Brock's conversations with Krouse during the night ride to New York revealed only so much as the little man wished Brock to learn. Nothing had been heard from the Eureka Laundry in the way of a complaint about a missing shirt. And while this had disappointed Julius Krouse, the absence of such a complaint indicated a belated desire to keep the matter secret. Mr. Krouse hoped that he would hear something while they were in New York. They were going to the Walpole Hotel, he said, for this was near the Hotel Maupin where Merillat had stayed while he had made the inquiries resulting in his discovery of the whereabouts of Emile Trudeau. They hoped to pick up some information, perhaps to find a trunk and more letters which would lead them to the man they sought. Brock was now quite sure that Krouse knew who that man was, that what he needed was sufficient direct evidence to warrant an arrest.

Profiting by the experience of his own fruitless inquiries of the little man as to the identity of the person Krouse "suspicioned," Brock asked no leading questions, for this, it seemed, only made Krouse more reticent. But in the course of their conversations he learned by deduction these facts—that, for some reason, the detective believed the guilty man had left Laurel immediately after the meeting with Johnson in the night; that Krouse knew something about the man's habits in New York, possibly where he was to be found when needed; that the preliminary examination of Johnson, though revealing nothing as to the identity of the killer, had strengthened Krouse's convictions to the point where he could move definitely in one direction; that the money drawn from the Farmers National

Bank of Northampton was to play a part in the identification of the criminal, who, moving with more freedom when he thought he was no longer observed, would place himself in a vulnerable position.

As to what he knew of the past history of the man he suspected Krouse would say nothing, constantly urging Brock to be patient until the moment when he could let him more definitely share his views. One question he asked gave Brock an idea of the sort of thing that might be required of him.

"You know the night life of New York pooty well, a'ready, Mr. Brock?"

Brock admitted an acquaintance with some of the night clubs.

"I guess you make a better looking sheik than I do, Mr. Brock," he said with a laugh. "Maybe they might be taking me for a waiter."

This explained the command to be sure to bring evening dress.

"I'm not much of a sheik," Brock replied with a grin, "but I'll take a chance if it's necessary. Are there to be women in this game?"

"Maybe. And you'll need money."

Mr. Krouse removed his corkscrew cigar and blew a cloud of smoke at the passing landscape. Brock had the sense of a fine gesture as the little man pulled from his pocket a roll of bills as big as his fist and showed them to his companion.

"You just, now, call on me, for what you need, Mr. Brock," he said with an air of a potentate. "We get some more where this came from."

It was, perhaps, the largest sum of money Mr. Krouse had ever had in his pocket at one time in his

life, and he seemed to be enjoying a delusion of his grandeur.

Brock smiled. "I wouldn't advise you to go showing that around, Mr. Krouse. Just about three million people in New York are waiting to frisk it away from you."

"Don't you worry, yet. I may of had moss on me once a'ready, but rolling around a little has given me the hell of a polish."

2

The Walpole Hotel had been notified as to the time of their arrival. From the Walpole, where they left their bags, they walked to the Hotel Maupin in the west side fifties, a double brownstone residence which had been converted to commercial uses. They entered a door level with the street and came into a small office adjoining the main dining room which was used as a public café. There were several long tables, indicating the *pension,* while a number of smaller tables along the walls provided for transient guests. The atmosphere was foreign and the woman behind the desk, tall, sharply featured, with graying hair, announced herself with a French accent as Madame Maupin.

If Brock had thought that the sophistications of New York would isolate his friend Mr. Krouse, he was soon made aware that the forcefulness of his personality and the quaintness of his humor were to carry him past many barriers. For queer locutions of speech are the rule rather than the exception upon the streets of New York where English is spoken more often with an accent than as intended. With an air to be envied, Mr. Krouse ordered breakfast and then, taking Madame

Maupin into his confidence, told the tale of the death of Merillat. Then, having aroused her interest to the point where she came to the table and shared their morning coffee, he questioned her as to her disposition toward the man's affairs, and finding her indifference genuine, he told her of the object of their visit and asked her in the name of the law for all the help that she could give them.

She proved to be less acid than her appearance, mellowing with her interest in the affair and offering any information that she possessed. Monsieur Merillat had given her no trouble. He had had a small room at the top of the house, but appeared to have plenty of money, for he paid his bills promptly when they came due. He was, she found, fond of following the races and had made some money, he told her, backing the horses at Tia Juana, Havana and Rio de Janeiro. He had become a friend of other Frenchmen in the house, and seemed very contented while at the Hotel Maupin. He had not told her the object of his visit to the United States and she had supposed him to be a man of means seeking travel and recreation.

In reply to Krouse's question as to his intimate friends, she spoke of men and women who came sometimes to dine with Merillat at the hotel. Monsieur Perard, who had a room adjoining that of Monsieur Merillat, could tell them, perhaps, more about these intimates. It was almost time for Monsieur Perard to come down for his coffee and *brioches.*

Monsieur Perard, who entered the café a few moments later, was a violinist in the orchestra at a theater. But as no rehearsal had been ordered for the morning, he lighted a cigarette, put aside his *Courier des Etats*

Unis, and offered the friends of Madame Maupin his time and services. He was very much shocked at the terrible fate of Monsieur Merillat—a man embittered by the past, it seemed, but with a warm heart for those he liked. He seemed to thrive upon excitement, however, and was a gambler by nature. Monsieur Perard had seen much of him when he had first come to the Hotel Maupin, but later he chose the society of those gay ones of the gambling fraternity and the night clubs. As Brock questioned, he frowned.

"I do not see why I should not tell you what I know since Monsieur Merillat is gone. The crowd he associated with were the people connected with the pool rooms where odds are given and taken on the racing meets. Their headquarters were at the Hotel Ulysses in Forty-ninth Street. Jim Delaney, the bookmaker, has been here, and several young men about town, Otto Rosensweig, the comedian, Sadie Newbury, a dancer in the revue where I play in the orchestra."

It seemed to Brock that the long blue jowl of Julius Krouse had fallen while the good Monsieur Perard mentioned these names. Perhaps he had hoped at once to identify the man he sought. Brock remembered Delaney as a man who had once been in the police records.

"And which one of these people was Merillat's best friend?" Brock asked.

"A young man who came here, I don't think I ever heard his name."

"What do you know about him?"

"Nothing much. The Rialto is filled with young men you don't know much about."

"What does he look like?"

"Tall, good looking, always very well dressed."

"Dark?"

"No, blond."

"How old?"

"About twenty-six or seven."

"Did he, now," Krouse broke in suddenly, "wear colored shirts and collars fastened back with a diaper pin?"

Monsieur Perard smiled.

"Now that you speak of it, I think he did."

"Did you talk to him?"

Monsieur Perard nodded.

"The room of Monsieur Merillat was next to mine. Once or twice this fellow came up there and spent the evening talking. One night they talked so long I could not sleep, so I went to the door and told them to stop."

"Could you hear what they talked about?"

"No. But the young man brought a bottle of whisky and Merillat was drunk, very drunk indeed."

"And they stopped talking then, a'ready?"

"Yes. The young fellow went home."

"Was he drunk too?"

"No. He didn't seem to be. Merillat, I think, was not used to American whisky."

"What else do you know about this young man?" Brock asked again.

"Nothing else. Oh, yes. Merillat told me he was in love with Miss Newbury and Delaney didn't like it."

Monsieur Perard shook out the pages of his newspaper significantly. "I think that's all I know, gentlemen," he said politely.

Krouse and Brock got up and went to their rooms at the Walpole to unpack their suitcases. Krouse still

seemed thoughtful and disturbed. But it was not until they were ready to go out that he unburdened his mind to his companion.

"We may be on the right track, Mr. Brock. But it ain't any too clear which way it leads. We got to play this game pooty close to our chests. Is this young fella the man we're looking for? I was hoping to give you a nice little surprise. Now we got to wait."

Brock nodded.

"The Ulysses Hotel is our best bet, I'd say."

Krouse frowned. "We got to be pooty slick, Mr. Brock. We're hunting a fella who knows who we are a'ready. And we ain't too sure we know him. If he saw us together he'd skip out. We got to find a way to watch him without him watching us. Understand?"

"I'm not sure I do," said Brock.

"Well," Krouse went on with a grin, "you might see somebody down here from Laurel that would surprise you."

"Who? Why can't you tell me?"

"Because I ain't as sure now as I was. And I don't want you to do anything foolish."

"I'd rather do something foolish than have somebody shooting at me again without my knowing who he was," Brock replied soberly.

"You just let me plan this inwestigation, Mr. Brock. We got to go our own ways. I got to find out something about this Jim Delaney. And you, you got to make friends with Miss Sadie Newbury."

"You're acting on the theory that this friend of Merillat's is the one we're after?"

"Yah. I may be wrong. But you got to make some guesses in this game. For why does this fella make

friends with the Frenchy? For why does he get him drunk unless he's got something to get out of him? It fits in the puzzle, ain't? Merillat tells him about Trudeau maybe and the easy money he's going to get for blackmail."

"By George," Brock gasped. "It does fit, Mr. Krouse."

As a theory it was perfection, though it explained nothing of the mysterious happenings that connected Brock with the crime. But he made no comment on that.

"That's all right," he said, "except for Johnson. Where does Johnson come in?"

"I ain't sure. He's holding this fella up for blackmail. He must know he did it then. We can't break Johnson down without more evidence. But I got an idea Johnson was after that money same as the other fella."

"You got some friends in the theater business?" Krouse asked suddenly.

"Yes. One of the dramatic critics is a good pal of mine. I can manage to meet this Newbury girl, if that's what you want."

"Well. Better not waste any time."

"What do you want me to find out?"

"All you can about this fella that's been running with her. How much money he's got and where he gets it from. Also maybe keep your eyes open for hundred dollar bills of the Federal Reserve Bank in this series," and he handed Brock a slip of paper.

Brock glanced at the numbers—B 732500 K to B 733500 K.

"All right, I'll do what I can."

They separated, Krouse to make inquiries about Delaney, Brock to find a phone where he could get in touch with Martin Alderdice, who ran the theatrical page on his old paper, to succeed at last in making an appointment with him for lunch. Miss Newbury, he soon discovered, was a high flyer, a gold digger of the species whose acquaintance promised to be expensive. So Brock decided to represent himself as a motion-picture man named Wetherby, from Los Angeles, who had been attracted by her face and figure from the front of the curtain. He was introduced to her and managed to arrange a luncheon engagement at the Plaza. Brock was no sheik but he knew his way about the world and it didn't take long to understand the character and motives of his companion. Expensive food, orchids, candy and automobile rides were the price of her regard, which he proposed to win as speedily as possible. He had the good sense not to make love to her and his attitude was unusual in her experience. If he catered to her vanity and her love of luxury he let her understand that the *quid pro quo* was a business arrangement that would be profitable to them both. Her usual defenses broke down, therefore, and he found her an amiable sort of creature. very much spoiled by attention but quite willing to accept the big-brother attitude of her new acquaintance, Mr. Wetherby,

CHAPTER XIV

THE CAT COMES OUT OF THE BAG

A WEEK had passed. It was a waiting game.

"I found out all I want to know about Delaney," Krouse said. "This week I'm going to play some long shots on the horse races at Tia Juana."

"If you do you'll lose your money, Mr. Krouse."

"I got a hunch I won't," he said.

Brock called at the Pendennis and saw Judith Kennedy. He told her of Krouse's plans and of the belief that something definite would come out of the visit to New York. She proposed to do some investigating herself, she said, visiting the friends of her aunt and mother, in the hope that some word would be dropped that would indicate the sort of place where her uncle Emile might have taken refuge. She asked Brock's advice about putting an advertisement in the personal column of one of the newspapers addressed to "E. T.," telling where she was and signed "Judith." He told her he didn't believe such an advertisement would reach Trudeau's eyes but saw no harm in trying the experiment.

She seemed to be aware of dangers that Brock might run if he came into close quarters with the man they were seeking, dangers magnified in her mind by the mysteries that had been a part of the case, and by the terror shown in her uncle's letter to her.

"I've never been frightened in my life before. But there's something almost occult and unbelievable in the chain of circumstances connecting you with the case! It almost seems to me as though some power beyond life had taken charge of my uncle's destinies and mine."

"And yet," he said smiling, "this power that you call occult, diabolical as it seems, lies in the hands of some creature you and I have both seen in Laurel or Northampton."

"That I can't believe."

"You must. A mystery of this sort is always very simple after it is solved. It's the faith of Julius Krouse in his own theory that gives me my eagerness to go on. He may be wrong, but nothing that has happened yet has made him change his plans in the slightest degree, or modified his original suspicion. There's something pretty fine in a simplicity like that."

"But why won't he tell you whom he suspects?"

"He's afraid I'll move on my own initiative as I've done before and upset his plans—or make some blunder that would give our man a chance to get away."

"You believe, then, that you're on the right track?"

"I believe in Julius Krouse," said Brock.

They dined together and Brock returned to the Walpole and Mr. Krouse.

Mr. Krouse was of the opinion that the stolen money would emerge very slowly from its hiding place, that the thief would not dare to deposit it in any bank. The man who had killed Merillat had thus far made no mistakes. All that had been discovered had been due to the cleverness of Mr. Krouse. Would the man they were after, now believing himself safe from observation, take the chance of using the stolen money freely

in New York? The phrase of Monsieur Perard which suggested that the man they suspected was at odds with Delaney seemed to suggest the greatest possibilities. This was a statement which could, in time, be verified. Brock had laid his plans to learn from Miss Newbury something about her friend and hoped that a chance word would give him the opportunity he sought. His acquaintance with the girl was necessary to their plans but there was no telling when the man would appear. And if he saw Brock with Miss Newbury before their plans matured, he would, of course, if he were the guilty man, take flight at once—possibly leave the country and be seen no more.

One circumstance favored Brock. Sadie Newbury seemed to be no more anxious that Mr. Wetherby should meet her friends than he was, and so their luncheon engagements at the Plaza had been arranged with a view to avoid all of her acquaintances who took lunch at the Ulysses. And, when at last his big-brother attitude had, he thought, made its proper impression, he asked her one day quite frankly the questions that were in his mind.

"Of course, you're free, Miss Newbury. I mean if we came to an agreement, you'd have no ties to keep you in New York."

"Well, Mr. Wetherby," she said with a smile, "there's Jack Hoyt and Jim Delaney. Jack is my boy friend. Mr. Delaney is jealous of him. It might be a good thing if I went away for a while. I wouldn't hesitate a minute, if it wasn't for Jack."

"Jack Hoyt!" This would be a blow to Krouse who confidently expected that the name of the young man would be a revelation to Brock. He waited a

moment, lighting a cigarette until he was certain of his voice. And then, "You're fond of Mr. Hoyt?" he asked.

"Yes. He's a peach of a boy, but I've just got sense enough not to marry him. He's pretty wild—always getting into some kind of trouble or other."

"It might be a good thing for you, too, to get away then."

"No. I don't want to leave him. He's in trouble now and that makes things worse."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I wonder if I could help. I'd like to help *you* if I could."

"It's a long story. Mr. Delaney has been mighty good to me, but I can't let him put the thumbscrew on Jack the way he's doing."

"Is it money?"

"Of course. Jack got into the racing game and lost a pot of money—about ten thousand dollars. He owes it to Mr. Delaney, who wants to be paid. Jack can't pay. So Mr. Delaney is threatening him with exposure of another deal that would put Jack in prison. I've been trying to straighten things out—at least trying to keep Jim Delaney from doing anything until Jack can have a chance to make good. But you see, Mr. Delaney is jealous and that makes it hard all around."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know yet. Of course I've got myself to look out for—I've got reasons to believe Jack will square up his account when he comes back to town—he told me when he went away he thought he could, but I haven't heard from him."

"Where has he been?"

"Up in the country somewhere. He had some deal he expected to pull off."

"I see," said the spurious Wetherby, bending his head to conceal his triumph. "And haven't you heard from him?"

"No, I haven't; not a line. And that's what worries me. I guess the deal didn't come off."

"You think he's still in the country then?"

"Yes. He'd come to see me as soon as he got back to town."

"Perhaps he's pulled off his deal, seen Delaney, and straightened the matter out."

"No. I think, jealous as Jim is, he'd have said something about it."

"Did you ask him?"

"No. I haven't seen him since Sunday."

Brock paid the check and Miss Newbury took out her vanity case for a few moments of color restoration. Two people entered the crowded room and were shown a table at the further door. Brock saw them beyond Miss Newbury's pretty head in the mirror beside her, Judith Kennedy and Billy Mallory. The new arrivals bent at once to their luncheon cards while a captain awaited their orders. But Miss Newbury, with a glance around the room, had risen and Brock helped her into her coat, striving as he did so to turn his back on Judith Kennedy. In a childish moment, it seemed to him that his companion was almost too ornamental for Judith's comprehension. They went out, but whether Miss Kennedy and her companion had noticed their departure he did not know.

His first mental reaction from the afternoon, curiously enough, had been a sense of disappointment that

Judith Kennedy had not told him that she expected young Mallory to be in New York. What was he here for? He hadn't liked Mallory and liked him less when he realized Judith's friendliness for him.

Mallory! Why hadn't he ever thought of young Mallory definitely in connection with the crime? The idea, even now, seemed absurd. But what was he doing in New York? It was impossible that he could be Jack Hoyt and yet, he realized that Miss Newbury had been so busy with her vanity case that she had not noticed the late arrivals. It was Julius Krouse who quickly took the substance out of this hypothesis, for when Brock mentioned Billy Mallory, Krouse only gave him his gargoyle smile.

"Well, he's blond, isn't he," Brock insisted, "about five feet ten, a hundred and seventy pounds. What's he doing in New York?

"Buying feed for papa maybe," said Krouse amiably.

The discoveries that Brock had made about Jack Hoyt were so much capital to their credit, but Mr. Krouse only looked puzzled at the information. He had hoped that the name of the young man would have made their problem easier.

"If this fella Hoyt is the man we're looking for a'ready," he said with a scowl, "then Hoyt ain't his name. And what I want to know is for why did he change it."

"If he'd been keeping bad company and getting into scrapes—" Brock ventured.

"Well maybe. What you tell me helps a little. . . ."

"At any rate it gives us a line on the kind of fellow Hoyt is."

"Yah. Also it shows us why he had to have Tru-

deau's money—to square this fella Delaney. He's a pooty slick kind of a fella all right—got good brains. Maybe he wouldn't of killed Merillat if he could of got away with it. I never had the idea this fella was a regular criminal. He was just desperate. But he *did* kill Merillat and take that money and we got to get him. I think we're going to get him, Mr. Brock."

"Through Delaney?"

"Maybe. I ain't done such a bad day's work myself."

It seemed that Mr. Krouse instead of losing money on the Tia Juana races in Jim Delaney's books had made a killing. For at this point in the conversation, he took from his pocket a roll of bills twice as large as the one with which he had arrived in New York.

"I always been lucky, Mr. Brock," he said as he put the roll of bills on the table. "Just dumm Dutch luck maybe. But I got here, now, about a thousand more dollars for you to spend buying lunch for show girls."

He picked out a bill on the inside of the roll and fingered it tenderly while he grinned at his companion.

"I like 'em when they're hundreds, Mr. Brock. That's why I had to play for big stakes."

"You mean—" Brock started forward eagerly and took the bill from Krouse's fingers.

"Yah. It's one of the bills that Trudeau got from the Farmers National Bank. Look at it, Mr. Brock. Federal Reserve Currency, Philadelphia, new, number B 73362 K."

"Then somebody paid it to Delaney—"

"Sure he did. This fella has come back to town. I guess we ain't made any mistakes so far, Mr. Brock."

Brock examined the bill carefully, comparing it with the slip that Krouse had handed him.

"Well, what are you going to do now?"

In reply Krouse asked a question. "Got any influence at Police Headquarters yet, Mr. Brock?"

"I think so."

"Well, we got to have authority for what we do. I got right away to see the cashier of the Fortieth National Bank. I found out that's where Delaney keeps his account."

They took a taxi down town where Brock saw William Fawcett, a friend of his in the Detective Bureau, to whom the case was explained.

"Tracing bills is one of the hardest things we have to do," said Mr. Fawcett, "especially when you want to move under cover. The money of these gambling men changes hands quickly in cash transactions. But in the case of a large amount like this you might be able to find a few more of the bills. Of course I'll go with you to the bank the first thing in the morning."

"You see, we've got to get enough evidence to put the screws on Delaney," said Brock, "so that he'll be obliged to pass the buck to the man who gave him this money."

Mr. Fawcett nodded. "Have you got any one under suspicion?" he asked Krouse.

"Yah, we have, Mr. Fawcett, but he's keeping pretty dark."

"Are you sure he's in town?"

"Yah. But he's moving very careful. He must of paid this money over to Delaney last night in his room at the Ulysses or somewheres."

"Is he staying at the Ulysses?" Fawcett asked, his

keen eyes rather dubious of Joe Brock's companion.

"No. Not under the name of Hoyt—or under the other name I know him by. I been watching that place for a week a'ready."

"You seem to be pretty sure you're on the right track."

"Well, I guess this hundred dollar bill I got shows we ain't far wrong," said Mr. Krouse dryly.

It was not difficult to gain the confidence of the cashier of the bank for there was magic in the persuasions of the Detective Bureau. A clerk was at once assigned to the task of finding what deposits Mr. Delaney had made during the preceding day. None were found. And a search of cash revealed no bills of the required numbers in the currency of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia.

This was a disappointment, for Mr. Krouse had hoped to make his evidence overwhelming. But at Mr. Fawcett's suggestion, the receiving teller was to watch carefully all day, reporting if Delaney should make a deposit and calling the bookmaker at once to the office of the cashier. Brock gave Fawcett the telephone number of the Walpole Hotel and they went back there to wait. There was nothing else to do.

"A good deal depends on this here Delaney," said Mr. Krouse, as he lighted one of his corkscrew cigars. "I guess he don't care much about this other fella, from what you found out from the Newbury girl. But the girl might spoil our game some way if we don't watch out. These crooks stick together when they have to. And now that this fella's paid what he owes—"

"But even with the evidence of the bills you haven't got Hoyt yet," said Brock. "And if he gets suspicious

. . . where is he? That's what I'd like to know."

Mr. Krouse spat with great accuracy at a cuspidor. "That's what you got to find out, Mr. Brock," he said with a grin, "from Miss Sadie Newbury."

They waited until late in the afternoon when Mr. Fawcett called Brock up, asking him to come down at once to headquarters, and they obeyed the summons at once. They found the receiving teller of the bank awaiting them in Fawcett's office. He had in his possession about five thousand dollars in the new bills of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, received during the afternoon in a deposit by Delaney. Delaney, still unaware of the purpose of Detective Headquarters, was waiting in an adjoining room, for Mr. Fawcett had thought it wise to await Brock and Krouse before beginning the inquiry.

"Perhaps you'd better state your case yourself, Mr. Krouse," said Fawcett. "It all depends on how much you want Delaney to know."

"I guess he's in a pretty bad fix, if he don't tell the truth, ain't? But I guess we'll go slow and see what happens."

While an officer went to bring the gambler, Fawcett whispered in Brock's ear, "I suppose you know what you're about, Joe."

"What do you mean?"

"This tramp detective you've sprung on me—"

Brock grinned. "You needn't worry about him. Just let him have his own way."

Fawcett glanced at the little man. With unshorn chin he was more forbidding than ever. He was studying a little notebook that he had taken out of his pocket and seemed oblivious of any comment. But he looked

up when Delaney was shown in. Delaney was slender, graceful, about six feet in height, long blond mustache, and looked less like the sport he was than an English military man. His face was imperturbable, though his keen blue eyes glanced quickly from one face to another, alighting at last on the little man at the table who seemed, curiously enough, to wear an air of authority. Krouse gave him a brief nod.

"I guess we met a'ready, Mr. Delaney," said Krouse pleasantly.

"Well, what can I do for you, gentlemen?" he asked as he sat, ignoring the implication of Krouse's presence.

"We just want to ask you a few questions about this here money you deposited in the bank to-day," said the little man coolly.

The glances of the two men met and held each other. It was Delaney's that shifted to Fawcett.

"What's the matter with the money? It isn't 'phony,' is it?"

"No," said Krouse. "Not so far as I know. But we got reasons to think you got it from a fella named Hoyt. Maybe that's so, maybe it ain't."

Delaney was puzzled as much by the sources of Mr. Krouse's information as by the strange locutions of the little man. He would have liked to smile but he didn't. For he always respected those who were able to win his money and Mr. Krouse had taken more than a thousand dollars away from him the day before.

"Well, as you seem to know where I got it, there's no use answering that question."

"I ask you did you get it from him or didn't you?" asked Krouse sharply.

"Yes, I did," Delaney replied after a moment of hesitation.

"All right. Now what I want to find out is what *you* know about this fella, Hoyt."

"Why?" asked Delaney.

"Well, there's a good many reasons a'ready, Mr. Delaney—" said Krouse craftily. "Some reasons that might be bad for Mr. Hoyt, some reasons that might be bad for you."

"I haven't any responsibility for him."

"Well, I wouldn't say that altogether yet, Mr. Delaney."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you're responsible now, ain't you, for the money we found on you? Suppose I said that money was stolen some place, things might look bad for you unless you could tell where you got it a'ready."

Delaney's bland manner had received a shock. He frowned and stroked his mustache.

"So that's it," he muttered.

"Yes. You wouldn't up and put yourself in a position like that, now would you, Mr. Delaney?"

Delaney glared at Krouse for a moment and then decided to smile. It wasn't a pleasant smile, but it served to lower the tension of the interview.

"I don't know where Jack Hoyt got this money," he said.

"We got to prove that," Krouse insisted. "Maybe if you answer questions put to you, you'll help me some and help yourself a little too. You ain't under oath, but you're in the hands of the law just the same as if you were in court. If this man Hoyt, now, is a friend

of yours and you try to protect him, you'll get yourself into a peck of trouble."

"Well, I'll tell you what I know."

"Good. Now we understand each other a'ready. This fella Hoyt, that ain't his real name now, is it?"

"It's the only name I ever knew him by."

Krouse frowned at this information which was not what he had hoped for. But he went on unperturbed.

"Fellas in the sporting crowd sometimes have two, three names, ain't? How long have you known Jack Hoyt, Mr. Delaney?"

"About a year, I'd say."

"And you never knew him by any other name but Hoyt?"

"No."

"Well, you knew he was one of these kind of fellas —a sort of a sheik, blond hair, fancy dresser, who might of started all right but got into bad habits. The kind of a fella that you wouldn't put apast something shady if he thought he could get away with it. Maybe he might of found the name Jack Hoyt suited him better than his real one when he pulled off that last crooked deal you know about."

It was a random shot based on the meager information that Brock had given him, but it served its purpose. Delaney looked at the little man with a new interest and respect, which was reflected in the quick glance of Mr. Fawcett. But Delaney made no reply.

"You remember that deal, Mr. Delaney?"

"I had nothing to do with it."

"I'm not saying you had. But you knew about it."

"Yes."

"Well, Hoyt owed you a lot of money and you swore

you'd wise-up the police if he didn't pay you. Ain't?"

Mr. Delaney was really startled by the accuracy of all this information.

"Well," Krouse continued smoothly. "You can see you're in a pooty bad fix if you can't tell us where we can find Hoyt. We got this money spotted and we know where it came from. You *say* Hoyt paid it to you. But you'll make things easier all around if you'll give us a chance to ask Hoyt where he got it. What we want to know is where we can find him."

"I don't know where he's staying. He used to stay at the Ulysses, but he's not there now."

"But you must of seen him a'ready to have him pay you this money."

"He phoned me. I met him in the inside corridor of the Knickerbocker Building two days ago—and he counted out the money then. I haven't seen him since."

"He didn't tell you, now, where he was staying, then?"

"No."

"Wasn't that kind of funny?"

"I never thought about it. I was glad to get paid."

"Then you don't know where we can find him?"

"No."

"You can't give us any ideas?"

"No. He's been away. I don't know where he's moved to since he's been back."

"Is there any way you could find out?"

"No. But I'll ask."

"I guess you'd better find this Hoyt fella, Mr. Delaney, unless you want to explain to the judge what you're doing with stolen money in the bank."

"You can't fix that on me."

"Who we going to fix it on then? You got a police record a'ready. Things don't look any too good for you in this case."

"I swear to God I don't know where Hoyt is. He's playing safe, I guess."

"Well, you better find him. We'll have to give you a chance before we take steps. What you think, Mr. Fawcett?"

"That's fair enough," said Fawcett. "In the meanwhile, we'll have to hold this money for evidence. Mr. Delaney can report here at this time to-morrow."

As Delaney rose, Krouse spoke again.

"A good looking young fella like that," Krouse suggested shrewdly, "he must of had maybe a sweetheart you know about. Ain't?"

Delaney frowned into his hat.

"Better think about that a little, Mr. Delaney," Krouse continued as Delaney did not speak. "But just remember that if you speak to any ladies and this fella Hoyt gets suspicious, we'll know you double-crossed us all right."

"I understand," Delaney muttered. "I'm not looking for more trouble."

"Well, we'll see you here to-morrow. Better phone Mr. Fawcett when you're coming, ain't?"

And Delaney went out, still frowning at his hat.

Krouse followed him on some mysterious business of his own and William Fawcett turned to Brock.

"I guess you're right about this trick detective of yours, Joe. I've got a job for him here in New York if he wants to stay."

CHAPTER XV

TWO MESSAGES

I

THE dangers Mr. Brock had suffered on her account had given Judith some sort of measure of his devotion. He was not greatly addicted to sentiment, for this, she thought, was not a weakness of the authors of light literature who reserved the tender emotions for their professional purposes. It was a friendly devotion, she was sure, but she had surprised in his glances from time to time an interest that could not be entirely professional. Circumstantial evidence had so deeply involved him in the affair of Castle Rock that he was determined to follow the case to a conclusion on his own account. But she was sure that her own inquietude had originally been the stronger incentive in his attempt to solve the mystery and find the thief and murderer.

This inquietude had grown no less in her change of surroundings. It seemed possible as the trail grew warmer that Mr. Brock might face graver dangers than those he had already passed in her behalf. He told her of Delaney, of the mysterious Mr. Hoyt and something of the interviews with the lady of the revues, Miss Sadie Newbury, who seemed, from Judith's slight knowledge of the world, to be a person who might be capable of anything. He had not told Judith of their

many luncheon parties or their automobile rides, but she was able to deduce from his few remarks that Miss Newbury was a handsome person with a love of the fleshpots and an inordinate vanity which he thought it his duty to satisfy. Judith had, accordingly, taken a private but exceedingly violent prejudice against this lady and though she concealed her distaste from Mr. Brock, she was quite sure that no good could come of their relationship.

She found herself worrying a great deal, therefore, as much about Mr. Brock as about her own unsucessful efforts to find Emile Trudeau. There had been no reply to her advertisements in the newspapers. She had talked with Bertrand Daumier to no purpose. She had found but two friends of her aunt and mother and neither of them had been able to give her any information that was of the slightest use to her. She had haunted the halls of the Post Office Building watching the general delivery window, hoping that Emile Trudeau might be seen there. She walked the streets for hours every day, keeping an eager watch for his familiar figure, but failing, of course, in her hopeless quest of one secretive old man among five million people.

Then, one morning, came a letter with a New York postmark Station X, forwarded from Bryn Mawr to the Pendennis and addressed in a writing that she did not know. As she opened it she saw that it was from Emile Trudeau.

CHERIE [she read],

Just a few lines from oblivion to tell you that I am still alive and thinking of you. Sometimes I feel that I cannot endure my position for another

hour without you. I now begrudge the months when you were at Bryn Mawr and I might have had you with me before the dreadful thing happened to separate us in spirit as well as in body. For I am now an outcast, a leper, who from my hermitage can only grieve and shout "unclean!"

I am not well. I shall die, I think, of my unhappiness but I pray that something may occur that will permit me to see you again before I go. What that "something" is, I do not know, and only hope, from day to day, for a revelation that will permit me to raise my eyes at least in a pretense of honesty to the eyes of honest men. Yet I can say nothing. My lips are sealed, not by an oath, but by something more binding even than that—a fear for your happiness and the loss of your affection. I cannot speak. I am dumb as the dead are dumb, for such indeed I am in all but the paltry uses of this mortal body which dares to die—yet cannot. I wish you to know that I have arranged my affairs so that should my death take place, all that I have of this world's goods is yours. You will find, in due course, that I have not forgotten you. And I pray that my money will bring you the peace and happiness that I have never had.

But, though I must be dumb upon my own account there is a matter I must speak about. In my own misery I have been selfish in not considering the terrible position of Mr. Joseph Brock. . . .

Judith stared at the written words, then looked away for a moment out of the window, halted by their significance. "The terrible position of Mr. Joseph Brock!" What did Emile Trudeau wish to say? She read on again, eager but frightened.

. . . the terrible position of Mr. Joseph Brock. Let him tell you, if he will, what happened in that room on that dreadful night. I do not know how far the investigation has proceeded or how much he is suspected, but I have no right to forbid him to protect himself. I absolve him. I dare not speak and he is helpless without my testimony. Let him tell you. Then keep silence for his sake and for mine. If he is threatened with prosecution, I shall try to protect him even if for me it will mean the end of all things.

I shall contrive in the next few days to learn what has happened in Laurel. In the meanwhile, tell him that if the worst comes I will not desert him. I have written a statement that will be found in case of my death. This, and only this, will exonerate him.

God help us all, and keep you free from danger!

Your always devoted if unhappy

UNCLE EMILE.

She put the letter aside for a moment, terror-stricken. Isolated phrases leaped from the page and flashed to her brain—"the terrible position of Mr. Joseph Brock"; "I have no right to forbid him to protect himself"; "keep silence for his sake"; "if he is prosecuted"; "a statement . . . that will exonerate him." What did they all mean? Could Joseph Brock himself be the guilty man? Impossible. And yet those damning phrases—"If he is prosecuted . . . keep silence for his sake. . . ." What did Emile Trudeau wish to say unless that Joseph Brock was guilty—that they had entered into a conspiracy of silence to save themselves?

And yet what of the attacks on Joseph Brock, the conversation between Johnson and the man in the gray

overcoat—were these merely the inventions of a guilty man to protect himself? And there was Julius Krouse who knew everything that had happened, had even come to the rescue of Mr. Brock in the fog when he had been so near death as a penalty for eavesdropping. Was Krouse also in the conspiracy of silence? Or was he just a fool, or mad like every one else connected with this terrible affair? There was no reasoning about it, no argument that could be used for one theory that could not at once be refuted by another argument for another theory. There was nothing to be relied upon now, nothing indeed but her instinct, her woman's instinct which, in spite of everything that she had read in the letter of Emile Trudeau, chose to believe still in the good faith and integrity of Joseph Brock.

She knew that she must see him at once and show him this letter or go mad with uncertainty and anxiety. So she put the letter into her handbag for safe-keeping and called him on the telephone, finding him, fortunately, at the Walpole Hotel, for the hour was early. He told her that he would come to her hotel at once, and when he arrived she led him to one of the deserted parlors and showed him Trudeau's letter.

While he read she watched his face turn from curiosity to bewilderment. But he showed no perturbation or alarm. His thick brows were caught in a frown that seemed to struggle against a faint smile.

"More circumstantial evidence," he muttered at last, "more than circumstantial now—direct. . . ."

She did not know what to say in reply to that and only faltered timidly, "What does it all mean, Mr. Brock?"

"God knows," he gasped. "I don't."

"Then you know nothing of what he's writing about?"

"Nothing. I have no knowledge of the crime. I was not at Castle Rock on the night of the murder. . . ." He straightened and looked straight at her in a kind of horror. "Judith! You can't mean that you suspect—that I—that I—?"

She had had her reply from him. It answered nothing. But her instinct, which she had chosen to rely on in this situation, did not doubt his innocence. She put her hand over his on her chair arm and looked at him straightly.

"No. I don't suspect you. That would be impossible after what you've done. It would be impossible whatever the evidence was against you."

"Thank God for that," he said with a nervous laugh.

"But you'll understand," she went on, "that such a letter as this is very disturbing. I can only think that his suffering has made my Uncle Emile unaccountable for what he thinks or writes. There's no other explanation."

"No. It must be that," said Brock thoughtfully. "Once, at Laurel, he wrote me vaguely of promises of silence that I had made him, but I did not speak of that letter because I thought it might worry you."

"My worries don't count now. You're innocent. I know that. If I can't believe in you I can never believe in any one again."

He took her fingers and kissed them fervently. Then he rose and turned to the window.

"You make me very happy," he said slowly. "I hope I can show in some way—that you'll understand my—my appreciation of your faith in me." He turned

toward the door. "But I'm under suspicion; if I didn't know I wasn't at Castle Rock on the night of the crime, I might even almost suspect myself. I've got to clear myself before I can tell you—before I can thank you for your belief in me—" he said hastily. And then with a brief word of good-by he went past the curtains leaving her standing there looking after him.

2

If this interview with Judith had given Brock something disturbing to think about, he was to be more greatly disturbed when he reached the Walpole Hotel, where Mr. Krouse was waiting for him, a telegram in his fingers. Mr. Krouse seemed far from happy for he was frowning at vacancy and sending forth from his corkscrew cigar, clouds of smoke, a sure sign of mental activity.

"Wire from John Corson," he said briefly. "Just came. Read it."

Brock sank into a chair by the window, aware of new and unforeseen developments, and he read with amazement the following words:

"Johnson has made a partial confession. Joseph Brock was in the library at Trudeau's on the night of the crime. Arrest him at once as a material witness pending further investigation. Am leaving to-night with necessary papers. John Corson."

Brock read the message a second time to be sure that he had made no mistake. Then he looked up at Krouse, trying to find some solace in the gargoyle smile. But Mr. Krouse did not smile. He was frowning at the ash of his cigar, waiting apparently for his bewildered companion to speak.

"Well, what you think of that now, Mr. Brock?" he asked jerkily.

"I—I don't know what to say," Brock replied dully, "except that I wasn't at Castle Rock that night—and that I don't know—anything about the crime. You know that."

"Yah. But orders are orders. John Corson is my boss, a'ready. I got to arrest you I guess, Mr. Brock."

Brock shrugged his shoulders. "Well, help yourself. Here I am. What are you going to do? Tie me to the bedpost while you phone William Fawcett?"

Krouse smiled at that.

"No, I guess you'll have to just, now, *think* you're under arrest, Mr. Brock, while you go out hunting this Jack Hoyt. You ain't got time to be really arrested just now."

"Much obliged. But what will you say to Corson if I decide suddenly to sail for Europe?"

"I guess I'll have to, now, take my chances on that. John Corson won't be here until to-morrow morning and by that time maybe we'll catch up with this here Hoyt fella. There's plenty of time yet to be arrested in. You got to see this Newbury girl again to-day some how. I went over to see Jim Delaney while you were out; we got him pretty scared day before yesterday. I got his story this morning—facts and figures also. He's jealous of Hoyt. He says Sadie knows where we can find him."

"Yes, but suppose she won't tell? She doesn't suspect me yet, but I can't ask too many questions or she might take fright and block the whole game."

"Well, you might get her on the phone at her apart-

ment, now, and date up with her for lunch. She's always ready to eat, ain't?"

"Yes. But I've worn this motion-picture man stuff pretty thin. I've got to produce a contract or something definite."

"Put her off until to-morrow. Maybe in the meantime Hoyt will turn up."

They went downstairs to the office and Brock got the show girl's apartment on the phone. But a man's voice answered. And before Brock could speak, Krouse clapped his hand over the transmitter and seized the receiver from Brock's hand.

"Wire all right this morning?" he asked in a lowered voice.

There was a brief reply.

"There was trouble reported. All O.K. now? Thanks."

Krouse hung up the receiver and turned to Brock.

"He's there, at her apartment," the detective said with the first excitement he had ever shown. "Come quick. We got to drive up to the Kenmore like hell."

He ran out of the door, Brock following. They found a taxi, at the corner of the avenue, and in a few moments were bowling uptown at a dangerous rate of speed. It was not until then that Krouse explained.

"He might of recognized your voice. I couldn't take no chances."

"How about *your* voice?"

"He don't know my voice like he knows yours."

"What!"

"Now don't ask questions. We got to watch the door of that apartment for him to come out."

"And what will you do if he does come out?"

"Get the bracelets on him quick. I ought to of phoned Mr. Fawcett, but we ain't got any time to waste."

Krouse's excitement communicated itself to Brock, who now sat silent, awaiting the moment that was to bring him face to face in broad daylight with the man he had twice met in the dark. He and Krouse were both armed and the chances of an arrest, should their man appear, were strongly in their favor. Scarcely ten minutes had passed since the telephone conversation when the taxi drew up at the curb on the avenue before reaching the cross street where Miss Newbury lived. They hurried to the corner where Krouse halted, while Brock pointed out a small apartment building on the north side, halfway down the block. Krouse searched the street up and down and then, apparently satisfied, took a position beside a fruit stand where he could watch, himself unobserved. He took out a corkscrew cigar and lighted it, keeping his gaze meanwhile on the door of the apartment.

"I decided not to call the Police Department," he said. "They might be sending up here a bunch of roughnecks and spoil the game. We make this arrest ourselves, Mr. Brock, and get all the credit for it a'ready."

Five minutes they waited, ten, and no one in the least resembling the man Krouse sought emerged from the door of the Kenmore. There were young ladies and old gentlemen, maids with dogs on leashes, a uniformed delivery man, children, but all the young men in the world seemed to have deserted this particular apartment house and street. As a quarter of an hour

passed Brock noticed that Mr. Krouse's frown had deepened.

"Maybe we ought to of went right up there," he muttered, as though to himself.

"Are you sure it was the man you're after?"

"Yah. I'd bet a million on it."

Brock's curiosity had grown beyond bounds.

"Why not tell me who it is?" he urged.

"Then you'd know as much as I do," Krouse replied irritably.

In this moment of uncertainty there was born in Brock's mind again the reflection that Mr. Krouse knew no more than Brock did and that in his uncertainty he was following a scent based upon the sound of a voice resembling that of the man he suspected. Why had he never told Brock the name of this man? Was he still afraid that his companion would betray confidence or make some mistake that would give the fellow a chance to evade them? Or was his reticence based upon the importance of his private information and a sense of drama in the final revelation as he chose to make it? Krouse was a funny little man. At the present moment, he seemed just that and nothing more.

Half an hour passed and Mr. Krouse stood silent, smoking and chewing at an apple which he had bought of the fruit man as the price of his post of observation. Then suddenly, a figure emerged from the Kenmore apartments and stood upon the doorstep, uncertainly glancing up the street and down. It was Miss Newbury. She was joined almost immediately by a young man from within the vestibule, a smallish young man in a brown suit. Brock recognized him as Otto Rosensweig, a song writer he had once met at the theater

while waiting for the girl. Brock drew his companion quickly aside and explained. Krouse swore softly.

A door porter or elevator man approached Miss Newbury apparently asking if she wanted a taxi, which she refused; for the pair walked directly toward the avenue. Krouse retreated and together they entered a cigar store, where they watched Miss Newbury and her companion cross the avenue and continue westward in the direction of Broadway. If the girl thought she was being observed she gave no sign of it for she did not look around and was halfway along the next block before Mr. Krouse decided what to do next.

"I might of been mistaken in that voice," he growled, "but maybe not. You got to follow that girl now, Mr. Brock, and meet up with her casual-like on the street. We look after this Rosensweig later maybe. I got to stay here and find out if anybody is still in that apartment. That fella may of given us the slip in the last five minutes when we weren't watching, but we got to take that chance. Go on now. I'll meet you later at the hotel."

And Brock went off, more uncertain in his mind than ever as to the success of their investigation. Until the present moment its failure seemed to throw into higher light the evidence against himself which at last had warranted the District Attorney of Northampton County demanding his arrest. Mr. Corson must have been pretty sure of Johnson's evidence to have taken this step. Johnson, of course, was lying—trying to incriminate Brock and save the real criminal, who, if arrested, would be unable to pay over the blackmail he had promised to Johnson. It was a foolish, desperate expedient on the part of the colored man, born perhaps

from a wish for vengeance in retaliation for his arrest. Corson's wire had said that Johnson had testified that Brock was in the library at Trudeau's on the night of the crime—a manifest impossibility since he had been at his Aunt Julia's house sound asleep. Damn the fellow! Brock found himself almost wishing that Johnson had committed the murder instead of this will-o'-the-wisp of Krouse's. But Johnson was not altogether guiltless—or he wouldn't be so ready to condemn other people.

While he thought of these things, Brock had for a moment forgotten the pair he followed. He caught a glimpse of them as they turned the corner into Broadway, but here, through a misadventure of intervening traffic, he unfortunately lost sight of them.

The day was Saturday, matinée day, so Brock made his way to the Walpole Hotel, planning to intercept her later at the stage entrance of the theater where she was employed.

CHAPTER XVI

MISS NEWBURY'S APARTMENT

I

HAD Julius Krouse mistaken the voice of Otto Rosensweig for that of the mythical Hoyt? Miss Newbury's habits were so irregular, her visitors so casual, that almost anything could be expected of her. Or had the song writer entered the apartment while Krouse and Brock were in the taxi and had Hoyt, suspicious, perhaps, of the telephone call, escaped before their arrival and before Rosensweig's? Great was the magic of money with apartment house porters and Julius Krouse would not return to the hotel until he had satisfied his curiosity as to the identity of all of Miss Newbury's visitors that morning.

Brock wanted very much to see Judith Kennedy again, to reassure her as to his innocence, now more dubious than ever to every one but himself since the telegram from the District Attorney. He wanted to tell her that he loved her and put to the test, at once, the nature of her regard for him. She believed in him, in spite of her perilous situation, for he had seen in her eyes this morning, for a brief moment, a look that had never been in them before, the mother look in an honest woman's eyes that is as old as eternity. She had said that she would believe in nothing if she could not believe in him and the thought of that loyalty gave him a new happiness that made him forget the ugly evidence of the morning which still seemed bent upon

connecting him with the crime. It was all nonsense of course. He could afford to laugh at it now in the perspective of his own knowledge of the whole affair, putting aside until after lunch the unpleasant thought that had constantly recurred during the past week, that many men, victims of circumstantial evidence, had suffered for crimes they had not committed.

It was fortunate that he had told the telephone operator to summon him for any telephone calls for the name of Wetherby, for he had hardly begun his lunch when he was called by Miss Newbury.

She told him that she had waited in for him until almost noon, hoping for a phone call inviting her to lunch. He told her that he had been very busy and offered to come to her at once. But as it was after one and she was obliged to be at the theater at two, she suggested that he should meet her after the night performance, and return to her apartment and talk over the motion-picture contract. It would be cozy then and there would be no one to interrupt. Brock agreed and went back to his lunch, sure that the affair with this lady was working out more successfully than he had planned or wished.

The return of Julius Krouse toward three o'clock provided a few interesting facts. The porter of the Kenmore had been amenable to reason. But he was sure that Mr. Rosensweig had not been up there. Mr. Rosensweig had an apartment on the second floor and had waited for Miss Newbury in the corridor until her arrival when they had gone out together. This information was inconclusive, meaning that some man had been in Miss Newbury's apartment without the knowledge of the porter—or that Brock had obtained a wrong

telephone connection. But there was a night porter off duty whom Krouse was bent on seeing later in the day.

Krouse then hinted at a visit to the office of Mr. Bertrand Daumier which had been satisfactory, but he would not tell Brock why he had gone or what he had learned—except that nothing had happened to change his plan of procedure. Brock's telephone conversation with the show girl aroused an immediate interest in the little man.

"Well, Mr. Brock," he said with a grin, "it looks as though you were beginning to make, now, a good impression on the lady. She didn't say nothing about this here Hoyt fella, did she?"

"Not a word."

"H-m. Maybe you cut him out a'ready."

"You don't believe that, of course. She's after my money—or yours—but she's keen for Hoyt. And if she gets an idea of what I'm about she'll defend her lover at my expense."

"But she don't suspicion you yet. You ain't getting cold feet, are you?"

"No. But I'm no wonder worker with the ladies and if she was just a little more clever—"

"I guess you think maybe," said Krouse with a laugh, "Miss Judith Kennedy ain't so keen to see you providing lunch and automobile rides for flossy chorus ladies."

"Well, I'm not keen on it. And I'm not keen on Sadie Newbury."

"She never invited you to her apartment before, did she?"

"No."

"It must be a nice apartment," concluded Krouse laconically.

The little man said he expected to be very busy most of the afternoon, and though he had had no lunch, said he was going out at once. At the door he turned.

"Did you know I had a wire from old Doc Wylie? He's coming down here to-morrow."

"What for?"

"H-m," said Krouse dryly. "Must be a medical convention or something."

When Krouse went out, Brock soon followed and went to the Pendennis to call on Judith. He noticed a slight reaction in her manner toward him, a reserve and a repression as though she had reconsidered her impetuous moment of frankness and tenderness. He could not understand and sat rather stupidly twisting his hat in his hands and not daring to utter the thoughts that had been in his mind. Perhaps he had been mistaken in his hopes of her. She asked him what he had done and he told her the adventures of the day. As she continued the inquiry he told her at last of the appointment at Miss Newbury's apartment and of his hope that something unforeseen would bring about a meeting with Hoyt.

"And what will you do, if he should come there to-night?"

"That depends. If he's the man Krouse says he is, I'd know him from having seen him in Laurel."

"And what then?"

"I'll probably follow him to the place where he's living and then notify William Fawcett."

"And if he isn't some one you've seen in Laurel?"

"In that case, Mr. Krouse will have to find a new assistant." He hesitated a moment and then, partly in bitterness at the tepor of her manner, "You see," he

said, "John Corson, the District Attorney, is coming to New York to-morrow and I'm to be arrested for the crime—"

"You! On the evidence of the revolver?"

"Worse than that. Johnson says he saw me in your uncle's library on the night of the crime."

"Oh, Joe!" His plan of campaign had been successful. There was no reserve in her manner now. He opened his arms and she came into them. "I can't let them do that," she gasped. "It's all a terrible mistake—"

"Of course—a mistake. We'll straighten it out. Nothing else matters but this. If you love me. . . ." He kissed her and she yielded for a moment, then suddenly sprang away from him as the thought of his danger came to her again.

"There's only one way to straighten this out. I've got to find Uncle Emile."

"That's hopeless."

"I'm not so sure now," she said eagerly. "His letter, the one I received this morning, was sent from Station X. I went there and made inquiries. It's on the East Side. There was a very nice girl there. I described Uncle Emile to her, she seemed to remember his wrinkled face, stooping shoulders, ill-fitting clothes and little hat. She said he came to the office sometimes just at the opening hour in the morning. It may not be Uncle Emile but I shall be there to-morrow—perhaps I shall see him—"

"Shall I tell the police—?" he began.

"No, not yet. That might frighten him. To-morrow perhaps I'll ask them to get reports from the neighborhood. If it only *would* be Uncle Emile. . . !"

"But suppose he will not speak—"

"He must. Since he didn't commit the crime and he knows who did, nothing else matters. Whatever he has done makes no difference to me, if he will only exonerate you."

"Perhaps I won't need him. Don't forget that I have Julius Krouse on my side."

"Yes—Julius Krouse . . . ," she murmured. "Either a great genius or a great fool—can you dare to trust to such a chance? I'm frightened—ever since that letter this morning. The evidence against you is so appalling. It seems to grow more so from day to day."

"If you can continue to believe in me—"

"I can. I do. But then all the world seems to have gone mad in the attempt to make you guilty."

She was very close to tears. It was his moment, but just then some people came into the parlor and he lost it. And then, as though uncertain of herself, she told him that some friends from Bryn Mawr were coming to see her and he went away.

2

Mr. Krouse did not appear at the Walpole Hotel until long after the dinner hour, when he came in, apparently dead tired but very hungry, and sat down at the table where Brock was taking his coffee. Krouse ate ravenously. Brock said nothing, aware that Krouse gave information only of his own accord and that questions would be futile. But after a while Krouse pushed back his dishes and took out a cigar, bit off the end of it and turned to Brock with a grin.

"Things don't look any better for you, now, Mr. Brock, unless we find Jack Hoyt somewhere. I had a

letter from John Corson. He sure believes you killed Merillat."

"He's mistaken."

"Yah. He's like the dog they say won't bite. You know it and I know it, but maybe the dog don't know it. Ha, ha. We got to show John Corson. He cross-examined your aunt, Mrs. Magruder, day before yesterday and she admitted she might of gone to sleep in her chair that night of the murder, for a while. So you *could* of gone out without her knowing it."

"I *didn't* go out, I tell you," Brock said angrily.

"Now, don't you get huffy. I'm just telling you—so you'll know what we're up against. I may have to arrest you after all, if something don't turn up before to-morrow."

"What *can* turn up? There's only one man who can really tell who killed Merillat. That's Trudeau."

"Trudeau! But he's lost! He may be dead a'ready."

"Trudeau! No. He's not dead."

Brock could not betray Judith's confidence and so he said nothing of his hope that the old man might still be found. To-morrow, perhaps, if his position became desperate, he would set William Fawcett to work on the clue Judith had provided.

Krouse seemed to be in a very good humor in spite of the dangers that hung about his companion. His stogy made him mellow.

"I got a coupla seats for this here show where Sadie Newbury acts up. We better be going there now. I want to see what she looks like to-night."

This suited Brock, for the evening would hang heavily on his hands until the hour of his appointment. He had seen the revue, but wondered what delight, aside

from amusement, Krouse could have in going. It was the usual thing, vacant smiles, vacant bodies and legs, a funny German comedian, who tried to be like Mr. Krouse and didn't half succeed; tableaux and spectacles; tabloid drama in burlesque. Miss Newbury looked very pretty. Her figure was admirable.

"I know why they call her, now, a 'show' girl," he said, with a grin. "I guess maybe they'd keep me out of meeting up in Northampton, if anybody seen me here. Say, Mr. Brock," he whispered, "you don't want to fall too hard for her to-night."

"You needn't worry about that."

"I'm just telling you."

"No danger."

"Well maybe there is. Maybe there ain't."

Brock glanced at the profile of his companion. It was set again in stolid lines, and he said nothing more.

He was silent during the remainder of the performance, not even smiling at the sallies of the comedian, but devoting all of his attention, when she was on the stage, to Miss Sadie Newbury.

The last thing he said to Brock in continued solicitation for his welfare was a further warning.

"If I was you I wouldn't be drinking anything up there to-night, Mr. Brock. Since this here Volstead business you can't tell what you're getting a'ready."

He slid away into the crowd and was lost immediately. Brock took out his pipe and waited for a while, watching the crowds, then moved around to the side street to the stage door. He experienced a sense of a new adventure, undiminished by his knowledge of the platonic and businesslike relationship that had existed between himself and the show girl. All of these

meetings had taken place in daylight, in the midst of crowds, or in the prosaic atmosphere of taxicabs. Brock was not given to the kind of small talk to which such girls are accustomed, and while he had flattered her, her looks, her graces, for reasons of his own, neither of them had created any misunderstandings as to the exact propriety of their relations. But night, somehow, seemed to make a difference in the quality of their meeting, which was, to his surprise, of her own making. He wondered at the warnings of Mr. Krouse, which suggested possibilities that had never entered Brock's mind. He had many reasons to believe that this girl was interested in him only for what she could get out of him and that the motion-picture contract that he had dangled in his background was of more importance even than the lunches, the candy and flowers that she had had at his expense. But, of course, women—especially women of her type—were an unknown quantity. And he blessed himself for the level head that had thus far kept him free from secret entanglements. And then, there was Judith—

Miss Newbury emerged unobtrusively from the stage door and had caught him by the arm before he had realized that she was there. He suggested a taxi at once, but she wanted the air, so they started walking uptown. She did not relinquish his arm and there was something more than usually confiding in her touch and in her manner. This was perhaps merely her expression of gratitude, more generously expressed for his many attentions. He was a creature of her world, here on the Rialto, a part of the irresponsible throng, which forgets that there is a daytime and lives for darkness, intrigue, and strange adventures.

He tried to meet her mood with one as careless as her own, though he wondered a little at this sudden access of fellowship.

"We ought to be good friends, by now, oughtn't we, Mr. Wetherby," she said, as though in answer to his thought. "I suppose you think I'm just out for what I can get like any other girl in this town. But I'm not. I don't go with boys I don't like, no matter how much money they have. And I wouldn't have gone out with you so much if I hadn't liked you. That's straight."

"I'm pleased to hear that. We've hit it off pretty well. And, of course, business—"

"Let's forget business, Mr. Wetherby. I hate calling you 'Mr. Wetherby.' Haven't you any other name?"

"Yes—er—Joe."

"Well, it's Joe and Sadie from now on. You've been mighty good to me, and you're no piker, Joe. Never tried any petting or anything. I like a man like that. But I'm reasonable," she said with a laugh. "And, I guess if you'd wanted a kiss in a taxi you might have taken it."

"I'm not much for petting parties," he said slowly. "Especially when a girl has a boy of her own."

She glanced at him quickly.

"Oh, you mean Jack? I haven't been out with him for a long while. You needn't talk about him."

"You mean, you haven't seen him?"

"No, I haven't."

"Isn't he back in town yet?"

"I should worry. There are other boys—"

She bent her head away from him, suddenly silent. There had been a false note in her voice. They crossed

the Avenue and turned uptown. "You needn't talk about Jack Hoyt," she said, with a quick dark glance at him. "It won't do me any good or you either."

This sudden change of manner was cryptic. He had a feeling that in that last moment her feelings were quite genuine, but whether in pique or in anger at Brock, he did not know. The Avenue was dim and deserted, for the theater crowds had preceded them and the only persons about were those who were returning home from belated business, or stragglers like themselves. But Brock did not mention Mr. Hoyt again.

At the Kenmore, a sleepy elevator boy took them up to the fourth floor, where Miss Newbury produced a key from her handbag and unlocked the door of her apartment. Her touch of a button revealed a pretty drawing-room with shaded lamps, gilded furniture, a couch in the corner, and an upright piano. His hostess took his coat and hat, disappearing then for a moment. It was a most innocent room, rather disorderly with cigarette ends, tobacco, a large box of candy, the lid on the floor, theatrical and motion-picture magazines and sheet music strewn on tables and chairs. Brock could see no signs of masculine occupancy, though his glances searched the room at every angle. She returned in a few moments, having laid aside her coat and hat, giving him a smile, and patting at her bright hair.

She led the way into her small dining room, and, opening a closet, brought forth bottles, glasses, and from a small refrigerator some sandwiches. "I'm always hungry after the theater," she explained. "I like my supper better than any other meal of the day."

He might have suggested that he had never noticed

she lacked appetite for lunch, but he only watched her preparation in silence. She kept no maid, she explained, because she didn't want anybody prying into her affairs. She didn't need a maid. She only had coffee in the morning and supper that she bought from the delicatessen store. Didn't he like her little apartment? She filled his glass and gave him a health to their better acquaintance. That was hardly a toast to be refused, especially as she put her arm in so friendly a way around his shoulders, as she offered the drink.

He searched her face. It was as free from guile as a stained-glass saint's. How absurd the suspicions that had crossed his mind from time to time in the walk uptown. Her friendliness aroused in him, for the first time, a sense of guilt in the part he had been playing. The man that he had been trying to find through this girl seemed as far away as when they had first met. Did she really know nothing of his whereabouts, as she insisted, or had Krouse been deceived by Delaney?

He raised the glass to his lips, and drank. It appeared to be a very sound Scotch, but it was not until a moment passed that he had his doubts of it. She was saying something, and he noticed that she had set her glass upon the table, untouched, and was lighting a cigarette. Things were not right with him. The table lurched. There were two Sadie Newbury's, both blurred, and he could not put them together. One of them was smiling, the other had a hard stare that was unfamiliar. Krouse's warnings came to him. He tried to look past his companion into the shadows where something moved, but a fog fell over his eyes, blotting out even his astigmatic vision. He fought upward,

trying to rise, fighting against a force that seemed to be holding him down, and found that he could not move. He heard a laugh, saw a face close to his own —a familiar face. The face of a young man, desperate or angry, and the mouth of the face was talking rapidly. The fog before Brock's eyes and in his brain lifted and fell, and he could only think in one lucid interval that he was amazed and startled that this person should be in this room at this time.

Then he had a sense of sinking into space and remembered no more.

CHAPTER XVII

REVELATION

I

IT had been the busiest day that Julius Krouse had spent in New York. After leaving Brock for the second time, he had stopped on the way uptown at the Pendennis in response to an urgent telephone call from Judith Kennedy. She was very much disturbed by the prospect of the visit to Miss Newbury's apartment that night, and had told Krouse frankly of her interest in Brock and her fear that he might be taken off his guard and dealt with violently, if the man Hoyt should be there.

"Have you got any ideas that this fella Hoyt will be there to-night, a'ready?" he asked.

"No, just an instinct, Mr. Krouse."

"H-m, instinct! Maybe you're right. Women's instincts are pooty sharp a'ready. When my old woman gets instincts she ain't never been wrong. But Mr. Brock knows pooty well how to take care of himself."

"Against a blow in the dark?"

Krouse smiled. "Your instinct is pooty clear now as to that, Miss Kennedy?" he asked.

She lost patience.

"Why do you let him go there without proper protection? Just because you know he's courageous and willing to take chances you don't dare to take," she said angrily.

But Mr. Krouse remained unruffled.

"I guess you don't mean that, Miss Kennedy. You got no reasons to think, any more than I have, that this here is no more than just a little quiet party. I got my own ideas just like you got your instincts, but we're both wrong, maybe, ain't?" He put his hands in his pockets and turned away from her. "I guess I understand your feelings, though, maybe. I'm going to do a little quiet inwestigating uptown now. And if I find out, what I hope, I'll see that Mr. Brock don't go to Miss Sadie Newbury's without somebody watching out for him."

"Oh, I see! You mean that you're going to bring in the police?"

"I'm not saying just what I mean except to try to ease your mind—"

"Why let him go up there at all, Mr. Krouse?" she asked pleadingly.

"For why? I got to. It's the only way, Miss Kennedy. This fellow that killed Merillat, he's pooty slippery, I tell you. I wouldn't put him apast anything if he could put the killing of Merillat on Mr. Brock. You know Mr. Brock didn't kill Merillat. So do I. But there's a lot of evidence that points to him. This fella Hoyt must know what Johnson testified to a'ready about Brock being in the library the night of the crime. Guess they talked that over before Johnson was arrested a'ready. So Hoyt wants to put the crime on Brock before he makes a get-away."

"But that doesn't make it necessary to send Mr. Brock into such a trap—"

"Yah," said Krouse nodding his head sagely. "Hoyt may think it's a trap for Mr. Brock, but I got some ideas it may be a trap for Hoyt instead." He gave

Judith his hand and then turned at the door. "Now, don't you worry, Miss Kennedy. If my ideas and your instincts are right something will maybe happen to bring your Uncle Emile back to Laurel. And as for Mr. Brock, it's the one chance he's got to keep from being suspected of having something to do with the crime. I'll keep you adwised as to what happens. Ain't?"

She was forced to be satisfied with that. She had learned nothing much to alleviate her anxiety, though she had to admit that Mr. Krouse had a forcefulness that gave her new courage.

Krouse made his way rapidly uptown to the Kenmore, for his interview with the hall porter in the morning, while revealing nothing as to the visits of Mr. Hoyt, had suggested a new line of investigation. No one answering to the general description of the man he sought had been in the habit of using the elevator and getting off at the fourth floor.

Mr. Krouse's success until the present moment had been due to his willingness to exhaust every possible opportunity, to omit no inquiry that might lead to results. There was a night porter whom he had not seen. He had found out where this man was to be found and he was prepared to spend a reasonably large sum of money in learning everything the man knew about who, either secretly or otherwise, came to or went from the apartment of the show girl during the hours he was on duty. Mr. Krouse managed to find this man in a small apartment on the East Side, just arousing himself from his daily sleep. At the sight of a bill with a yellow back, which Mr. Krouse laid upon the table, the man was wide awake at once. The bill, Mr. Krouse

informed the porter, would be his, if he answered truthfully and in confidence certain questions that Mr. Krouse would ask him about the habits of Miss Newbury and her visitors.

It would be possible for a man to use the service stairs and, provided he had a key, to let himself into Miss Newbury's apartment, without being observed by the elevator boy or the hall porter?

The man admitted that it might.

Had he ever observed any stranger using the stairs in the fire tower at night?

Yes, now that the matter was mentioned, he had. But he had thought it was one of the new tenants on the third floor.

Could he describe the person he had seen?

Yes, he could, in a way, and did so, to Mr. Krouse's great interest.

Had he ever observed the lights burning in Miss Newbury's apartment, while that lady was away at the theater?

Yes, he had. But then he thought that Miss Newbury might have left them lighted. It was none of his business. She had to pay for them.

Were there any parties recently in Miss Newbury's apartment?

Not noisy parties. No singing or piano playing. But he had heard the sound of a man's voice several times.

At night or in the daytime?

Both. But that was none of his business either.

Well, how did he account for a man being in Miss Newbury's apartment unless he was seen passing through the front door?

The porter eyed the bill on the table, scratched his head, and said he thought it might have been a visitor from another apartment on the same floor, or from the floor above or below. That wasn't any of his business either.

But Mr. Krouse, now greatly interested, took another bill from his roll, and laid it on the table beside the first. The money, he explained, was for correct information, given in confidence. Wouldn't it be possible for a man to have come to Miss Newbury's apartment during the last few days, and have stayed there most of the time, without anybody in the building knowing about it?

The porter admitted that to be possible.

Pressed for further gossip about Miss Newbury, he said that she had never been in the habit of entertaining men. There used to be parties in the apartment, late parties for men and girls, when there had been drinking, singing, and piano playing, until the tenants of the adjoining apartment had objected, and Miss Newbury had been asked to keep earlier hours or make less noise.

That hadn't happened for several days?

No, not for several weeks.

But he had heard a man's voice within several days?

He had.

That was all that Mr. Krouse had hoped to learn. He asked the night porter when he went on duty that night to keep a strict watch on the service stairway and on Miss Newbury's apartment, reporting to Mr. Krouse later in the evening, at the front doorway, what if anything, he had observed. The man agreed eagerly, and Mr. Krouse departed, leaving the two bills with

the yellow backs on the table, where he had placed them.

Then Mr. Krouse took a taxi and went with all speed to William Fawcett's office. It was a chance that he was taking, only a chance, and it might not lead to anything. But if Mr. Fawcett would provide the men he needed, and at the proper time, something interesting might happen—to all of which Mr. Fawcett agreed.

And thus it was that after Mr. Krouse had left Joseph Brock outside the theater, he made his way at once to the telephone booth, at the Hotel Astor, and informed the Detective Bureau that Miss Newbury would soon leave the theater, and that their plan should be put into operation, in accordance with the agreement. This plan was that Mr. Krouse should follow Mr. Brock and the girl to the Kenmore. At the corner he was to be joined by a plain-clothes man, who would be awaiting him. Two other men from the Bureau, also in plain clothes, were to be concealed in the court beside the apartment house, to watch the service entrance and the service stairs. At a given moment, to be announced by Mr. Krouse, they were to go up the stairs, one to the service landing on the third floor, another to the service landing on the fourth floor, to stop any one who attempted to descend.

Krouse followed Mr. Brock and Miss Newbury in the most approved manner, smoking a corkscrew cigar, and otherwise quite contented. At the corner, in addition to the plain-clothes man, he found William Fawcett himself, intensely interested in the situation and in the possible predicament of his old friend, Joseph Brock. There was, they thought, little time to waste, but Mr. Krouse went in first to see the night porter.

Miss Newbury had just come in from the theater, bringing a man with her, he said. There was something curious, though. The lights in the apartment had been extinguished all the evening, for he had watched the crack beneath the door and watched the windows from outside, and yet, at about ten o'clock, he had distinctly heard, from the landing, the cough of a man within the room.

"All right, you've earned your money," said Krouse briskly. "There'll be more coming to you a'ready if things turn out right. We want that coughing fella. I'll be in here in a moment with men from the Detective Bureau. Have you got a pass-key to unlock the door to that apartment?"

"I can get it."

"Good! We got no time to spare. There's men in the service court. They got to go up the back way to the third floor. You show them up. Then get your keys and meet me here in five minutes."

The mention of the Detective Bureau stimulated the night porter's activities amazingly, for when Krouse returned with Fawcett and the plain-clothes man, he was awaiting them at the door of the elevator, reporting that the men from the service court were already in their places.

"We'd better walk," said Fawcett. "That elevator's out of commission for ten minutes," he added to the elevator boy. The plain-clothes man was left to guard the foot of the main stairway, and following the night porter, they went up. The stairway and halls were silent and deserted, and, though it was only one o'clock and Saturday night, the occupants of all the apartments of the building seemed to have gone to bed. Nor were

there any sounds on the fourth floor landing, though they could see a slit of light beneath the door of Miss Newbury's apartment. They listened a moment, and made out a sound of voices, in a distant room.

William Fawcett removed a revolver from the hip pocket of his trousers and put it in his coat. Krouse, jealous of precedence in the affair, shoved his small body in front of Fawcett, and whispered to the night porter to unlock the door. It swung open, and Krouse went quietly in. The door into the dining room beyond was open, and the intruders now heard clearly the sound of a man's voice. They paused a moment, for a mirror over the mantel shelf of the living room exactly reflected the open door and the occupants of the room beyond. Krouse saw—what he had come to see. But, if the mirror reflected the occupants of the dining room to Krouse, it apparently had also reflected the figures of Krouse and his companion to the man within. For, though they rushed forward at once, they were only in time to see a man's back vanishing through the door into the kitchenette.

Krouse shouted, and, neglecting the sprawling figure on the chair and the startled show girl, ran forward, through the kitchenette, and out on the landing of the service stairs. Another glimpse he had of the fugitive as he leaped around a dim angle, and then, as Krouse ran down, he heard a hoarse command and the sound of two shots very close together, followed by the sudden crash of a falling body.

Krouse reached the lower landing just as the second detective came rushing up from below.

The man who had attempted to escape lay at the

foot of the stairs, his gaze flickering feebly toward the electric bulb above him.

"It was either him or me," said the detective, who had done the shooting. "He got me in the shoulder—"

"He's still alive," said Krouse. And then to the fourth man. "Come, we got to carry him back upstairs again."

William Fawcett, meanwhile, sure that their man could not escape, stood guard over the show girl. At the sound of the shots the lady rushed toward the door of the kitchenette, but Fawcett stood in her way.

"They're three to one," he said quietly. "He can't get away." He showed her his badge, and suggested that she sit down and compose herself. He raised Brock's empty glass and sniffed at it— "Knock-out drops?" he asked.

Miss Newbury had begun to tremble.

"I hope to God he's dead," she muttered tensely, glaring her hatred at Brock.

Fawcett went down on his knees before the chair of the prostrate man, and listened to the beating of his heart.

"He's not dead. He'll come around."

There were sounds of commotion on all sides, now, knocks upon the outer door, and the voices of people calling.

The night porter, who had followed into the room, opened the door from the kitchenette to the service landing, and Krouse and one of the detectives entered, carrying the unconscious figure of the man who had fallen.

"Well, we got him a'ready," Krouse gasped. He's the fella I suspicioned—the fella that killed Merillat."

"It's a lie," Miss Newbury gasped excitedly. "I know all about it. Jack told me the whole story. There's the man who killed Merillat—there!" And she pointed dramatically at the unconscious figure of Joseph Brock.

They had laid their burden on the couch in the living room. Fawcett tore open his clothing and found the wound, just below the heart, while the other detective phoned for the ambulance. At Fawcett's suggestion, the night porter put the coffee pot on the gas range to boil, as a first-aid measure for Brock.

After her outburst, the show girl had sunk into a chair, staring at the figure of the man on the floor, dazed, completely unmoved.

"So Jack told you the whole story," said Mr. Krouse coolly. "Maybe he didn't tell you, now, that his name wasn't Jack Hoyt, but Archie McDermott."

2

They carried Joseph Brock, Archie McDermott, and the wounded detective to the hospital in the same ambulance; and William Fawcett and Julius Krouse took Miss Newbury in a taxi to Police Headquarters as a material witness. She was very much shaken by her experience, but in the drive down town refused to answer any questions, keeping a silence of sullenness and of fear.

Third degree methods were William Fawcett's specialty, his manner with the women he questioned being, as a rule, very polite, very ceremonious, almost bland, but showing the hardness of the grain beneath. He knew that a woman under a high emotional tension was a more valuable witness than one in full control

of her reserve forces. So he decided on a patience that he had frequently found effective.

He and Krouse had surmised that this girl would have a lot to tell if they could only get the story out of her, and Fawcett set about her conquest methodically, showing her into his office, giving her his best chair, and leaving her to her own devices, while he and Krouse smoked and talked about the various aspects of the evening's encounter. But through it all the show girl sat, sullen, listening and watching them in a frightened way, but saying no word nor making any comment.

Half an hour passed.

"We're going to sit here until you're ready to tell your story, Miss Newbury," said Fawcett, turning to her politely.

She only set her lips and turned away from him. Fawcett turned to the telephone at his elbow, getting a number.

"Is this the Samaritan Hospital? This is the Detective Bureau. Please get McSorley, the detective who came in with those gunshot patients, on the phone at once."

There was a long silence. Mr. Krouse crossed his legs and puffed comfortably on his cigar, completely ignoring the girl, but he saw by the nervous twitching of her fingers that the strain of uncertainty was telling on her.

"Hello! That you, McSorley? This is the chief. How's the prisoner getting along . . . ? He died, eh! That's too bad. Any statement . . . ? Never came around? Well, that's hard luck. I guess you won't be needed up there any more to-night. You'd

better go home. How's Brock? . . . Oh, all right by morning. Well, so long—"

And Fawcett hung up the receiver, turning, settling down in his swivel chair, and taking up his cigar and ignoring Miss Newbury.

"You heard?" he asked of Krouse.

"Yah. I'm sorry. But maybe it's good for the family's sake. I don't think none of them had any ideas of the kind of troubles Archie had been getting in."

William Fawcett took up the clue.

"Nobody up in Laurel knew of the scrape he was in with Delaney?"

"No," said Krouse, "Archie was a nice kind of a fella. He liked a good time, but he and his pap didn't get along. The squire was pretty hard on him, maybe —especially in money matters—so when Archie came down here he got into bad habits."

"He wasn't what you'd call a habitual criminal, I take it."

"No. He just drifted, I guess, from one thing to another. But he had to have money. He needed a lot of money—what with women, the races, and so forth. But you'd never think he was that kind of a fella when he was up in Laurel living with the family. Kind of double personality, as the saying is. Up there he just did most what other folks did. Good-looking boy, natty dresser. All the girls were crazy for him a'ready. He was engaged to be married to one of 'em—mighty pooty. . . ."

"For God's sake," came Miss Newbury's voice hysterically, "how long are you two going to keep me

here?" She had risen and stood facing them desperately.

"That depends," said Fawcett.

"What do you want—to know?" she asked.

"Are you ready to talk?"

"Perhaps."

"That's better," said Fawcett, more warmly. "That's much better."

"What will happen if I don't speak?"

"In that case—well—I'm afraid we'll have to lock you up."

She hesitated a moment.

"Is Jack—is he really dead? Or was that a stall?"

"If he isn't dead, McSorley was lying to me."

She glanced at him keenly, her eyes dry and hard as agates. "I'll tell—what I know," she said quietly.

"Good. Come forward here, then, to the desk."

She obeyed.

"I had nothing to do with the Merillat case," she began quickly. When Krouse interrupted—

"You knew him when he was in New York a'ready, at the Hotel Maupin?"

"Yes, I met him there, but I never knew anything about the murder until day before yesterday."

"Archie McDermott—that's to say, 'Jack Hoyt'—he told you?"

"Yes. He told me the truth. He said you cops were after him, because things looked as if he'd killed Merillat. But he didn't kill him, he swore to God he didn't, and I promised to keep him hidden in my apartment until he could prove the crime on the man who committed it."

"He said Brock committed it. Ain't?"

"He did commit it. Jack Hoyt would have proved it if he hadn't tried to get away to-night. But, I'll do what I can to clear his name. This man Brock, or Wetherby, as he called himself, has been pumping me for two weeks. I never knew who he was until yesterday. He's a sneak and a coward. He went to that place where the old man lived, to try to steal some money the old man had got from the bank to give to Merillat—money he owed Merillat a long time. But Merillat came in and caught him at it. There was a fight and Merillat was killed. Jack had been sitting outside in a machine waiting for Merillat to come out, for Merillat owed him some money he'd promised to pay. When Jack heard the shots he went in the house. Somebody was coming down the steps, so he hid behind a door while the man passed. It was Brock, getting away. When he was gone, Jack went upstairs to find Merillat, and there he was, dead on the floor, and the old man wringing his hands and crying. Jack knew he might show up in a bad light, so he went away, too, as fast as he could."

"H-m!" said Krouse. "Why didn't he testify to that at the inquest?"

"He was afraid—"

"Why should he be afraid—if Johnson was ready to back him up?"

"Johnson was afraid, too. He knew what had happened, because he saw it from a closet in the old man's bedroom."

Krouse grinned. "He was after the money, too, wasn't he?"

"I don't know. I never heard that."

"Well, he was. I knew it from the first."

"Well, that explains why he hasn't testified to the truth."

"Yah. It does. But it don't explain why Jack Hoyt, as you call him, got you to bring Brock to your apartment and give him knock-out drops."

"I doped him because we didn't want any fight or noise. It was his word against Jack's, and you believed Brock."

"But, what were you going to do with him, Miss Newbury?"

"Jack was going to take him away, somewhere in the country, until he could prove the case against him, and make him confess."

"Somewhere in the country!" Krouse said dryly, "meaning the Hudson River?"

"No, no," she cried wildly, "it's all true as I tell you—so help me God."

"Yah. Some of it's true and some of it's lies. If you believed the lies because you were stuck on Archie, that's your fault." Krouse drew himself up and leaned toward the girl, pointing a long admonitory finger—"He was going to kill Brock, because he thought Brock knew he had killed Merillat. But Brock didn't know it. He don't know it yet—until I prove it to him. This fella you're trying to protect would of killed Brock if we hadn't come in in time. And you would have been his accomplice."

"He wouldn't. I don't believe you."

"You'd better believe me—for your own good."

She sank back in her chair, incredulous at this sudden change in the complexion of the story that she had told, while Krouse went on.

"I'll tell you, now, what happened, Miss Newbury,

if you want to know. Archie McDermott told you what happened a'ready except that Brock was the man who came in the house after the murder, while Archie McDermott, who had killed the man, was getting away with Merillat's money. Merillat had an appointment a'ready with old man Trudeau, but Archie got there first. When Merillat came in there was a fight. Merillat shot at Archie and missed him. So Archie took the gun away from Merillat and beat him over the head with it. When he saw what he'd done, he threatened old man Trudeau that he'd tell why the old man was paying Merillat that money; he also threatened to testify against him as the man who murdered Merillat. With the motive of blackmail, he might of succeeded in hanging Trudeau. So Trudeau went away and hid, and Archie McDermott, or Jack Hoyt, when he thought he'd thrown me off the track, came down here and paid your friend, Mr. Jim Delaney, the money he owed him. But he hadn't thrown me off the track, because I had a word a'ready of the numbers of the bills that Trudeau got from the bank and found them when Jim Delaney deposited them at his bank in New York. That was the deal," he concluded, with a flourish of the stump of his corkscrew cigar, "you told Mr. Wetherby your boy friend had gone up in the country to pull off."

The show girl had sunk back in her chair, the red spots of her make-up vivid against the pallor of her skin.

"And this—this man Brock," she gasped, "why didn't he testify to all this?"

"For why?" asked Krouse with a grin. "Because he didn't know nothing about it."

Miss Newbury stared vacantly. So indeed did William Fawcett.

"I—I don't understand."

"Neither does Mr. Brock. Maybe when the District Attorney of Northampton County gets here, I'll be able to explain it a'ready."

"Well, it will take some explaining," said William Fawcett curiously.

The girl was thoughtful, subdued, thoroughly frightened at her share in the evening's adventure. They decided it would be safe to let her go. She promised to hold herself in readiness to appear when summoned, so they sent her back to the Kenmore in a taxi.

Mr. Krouse yawned and glanced at the clock. It was half past three o'clock.

"I guess maybe we better be going to get some sleep, Mr. Fawcett." As they went out, Fawcett shook Krouse's hand.

"I suppose you know that phone talk was all bunk," he said.

Krouse grinned.

"I suspicioned it was," he said, "but it worked fine. Ain't?"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ENDS OF JUSTICE

I

THE following day was Sunday, enabling Brock to recuperate at the hospital before taking a further part in the Trudeau affair. Judith Kennedy, very anxious, phoned to Mr. Krouse during the morning, to be informed briefly of what had happened, and given a promise that Mr. Brock should see her on Monday morning.

John Corson, the District Attorney, had arrived in New York, bringing with him, at liberty, on bail, the negro, Thomas Jefferson Johnson, as a trump card in evidence to combat the expected legal attempts by Mr. Brock to prevent his return to the jurisdiction of the court of Northampton County. Mr. Corson was rather taken aback by Mr. Krouse's statement that Brock had not been arrested, that he was indeed at that moment in the Samaritan Hospital as a result of an attempt upon his life by the real murderer, who had, himself, been wounded, perhaps fatally, in attempting to escape. He demanded the name of the murderer and was frankly incredulous when he was told that he was Archie McDermott. But Mr. Krouse speedily satisfied him that no mistake had been made and promised on the following day a complete revelation of all the circumstances that had led to the discovery of the criminal.

The presence of the negro in New York fell in well

with Krouse's plans. And while he secretly deplored the indiscretion of John Corson in giving Johnson his freedom, he was glad of the opportunity to confront Johnson with Brock and with Archie McDermott, if the latter should so far recover as to be able to make a statement. The people at the hospital had informed him that they could not tell whether he would recover or not, for though he was conscious at intervals, he was very weak and might die as the result of complications that could not be foreseen. For the present, they said, it was highly inadvisable for any one to see him and would serve no purpose, as he was too weak to speak, and in his few moments of half consciousness scarcely in a condition to recognize any one.

But the presence of Johnson would, Krouse thought, bring the whole affair to the necessary focus, especially since all of the evidence was now so definite that he could drive Johnson into a corner, from which it would be difficult for him to extricate himself. Though the man was not guilty of the crime of murder, or even of theft, his complicity in concealing the real criminal, added to his questionable position in the closet of the bedroom at the moment of the crime, would take a good deal of explaining.

Mr. Krouse had a considerable sense of the drama in which he had played the leading part and, of course, deferring to the wishes of Mr. Corson, who had been forced to recognize his subordinate's achievement, arranged that on Tuesday morning, Johnson, Brock, Dr. Wylie, and a Dr. Ordway, should be summoned to William Fawcett's office.

Meanwhile Krouse went to the hospital and saw that what the doctors had said was true. It seemed to him

from McDermott's appearance that the end was only a matter of hours. Forgetting nothing, he phoned Bertrand Daumier, and had a wire sent to Squire McDermott at Laurel, telling of his son's injury, and asking him to come to New York at once. In his heart, which had its weak moments, he found himself hoping that Archie would die.

He found Brock sitting in an armchair by the window of a private room, weak from the rigorous restoration treatment, but professing himself quite well enough to go back to the hotel. He did not, even yet, seem to have a very clear idea of what had happened to him, for his memory of events had ceased at the table in Miss Newbury's dining room. He described a confusion of the brain which had come on him suddenly, the sense of a struggle against oblivion, a confusion of voices and of faces—of whom he could not remember. He had been treated for narcotic poisoning, they had told him.

Mr. Krouse enlightened him, taking an almost ingenuous delight in describing the adventure in detail. Even John Corson had not been so amazed as Brock was when Krouse uttered the name of Archie McDermott. Krouse showed Brock a note that John Corson had brought—a note addressed to Krouse, at the Court House in Northampton. It was from Miss King, the clerk of the Eureka Laundry: "Mrs. McDermott phoned to-day about one shirt missing; what shall I do?" Each hour now was to add a link to the chain of damning proof of Archie McDermott's guilt.

Brock could make no comment for awhile, only staring in stupefaction at the face of the detective.

"Well," he said at last, "I guess I've got to believe

you. But what of the evidence against me—the revolver, the footprints—"

"Now, don't you worry about that—until you have to, so long as John Corson is satisfied. It's a long story. We ain't got time to talk now. I promised Miss Kennedy I'd bring you to see her as soon as I could."

They stopped for a moment at the Walpole Hotel, while Brock changed his linen, and Krouse did some telephoning. Then they went to the Pendennis, where Judith awaited them. She had already heard of the arrest of the dying man. But her pity for Archie was not so great as her joy in learning that Joseph Brock was safe and no longer to be suspected of the crime. And even the presence of Mr. Krouse in the room, though he considerately turned his back, had no restraining influence upon her demonstration of happy emotion.

At last Krouse turned from the window with a friendly grin:

"Well, we got, now, no time for this here turtledove business, Mr. Brock. We got to lay some wires to find Emile Trudeau. If we can produce him, now, my case will be complete." He turned to Judith. "Did you go to Post Office Station X this morning, a'ready?"

"He wasn't there—hadn't been there for several days. I'm going again to-morrow."

"H-m. I guess we have to get the help of the Detective Bureau now. Some people of that district must of seen him. And if any of them had seen him a'ready, they wouldn't be, now, likely to forget him, with his funny little hat and baggy clothes. I'm going to get Mr. Fawcett to send out a handbill and offer a

reward. That ought to help. There's a lot of people would like to make five hundred dollars—just telling where a man lives."

"But I'm so afraid the police would frighten him—"

"Not when he knows once he's only wanted to be exoner—to be freed from suspicions."

"I suppose it's the only thing to do," Judith replied.

Krouse and Brock left the hotel to go to the office of William Fawcett and ask his advice in the matter, and to make further arrangements for the inquiry the following morning.

2

All day Monday Fawcett had been very busy on an important jewel robbery, and it was not until ten o'clock Tuesday that he was able to give Krouse the opportunity to explain the various inductions that had first led him to a suspicion of Archie McDermott, while most of the evidence in the case pointed to Joseph Brock.

It was almost time for the gathering of the various witnesses, but Fawcett was so interested that he insisted that Krouse should tell him the whole story, keeping the other persons summoned waiting in an adjoining room until their testimony should be required. So Fawcett and John Corson lighted cigars, Brock took out his pipe, and Julius Krouse found a corkscrew stogy.

It seemed that from the earliest moments of the investigation, Mr. Krouse had had some "ideas." Even before the questions put to the negro Johnson, Krouse was already suspicious of the man, because he had found a black shoe button on the floor of the closet

in Trudeau's bedroom. Trudeau's shoes, left in the room, were all laced, except one old-fashioned pair of congress gaiters. Krouse made a quick guess that Johnson had been recently in the closet of Trudeau's bedroom. And as the closet door was in a line with the door into the den or library, where Merillat had been killed, he also guessed that the button had come off Johnson's shoe while the man had been crouched, peering out through the keyhole. These were mere theories—they were mere theories even yet, though partly corroborated by Miss Newbury's story, but not to be convincing until Johnson could be made to confess. Nothing that had been discovered later had caused Krouse to swerve from his original opinion. He had taken pains at once to put Johnson at a disadvantage about his employment before he had come into Trudeau's service.

His conviction that Johnson knew all about the crime and that he was hiding his knowledge for purposes of his own, was merely increased by Johnson's denial that he had not heard any sounds that night, and by the way he had prepared Trudeau's breakfast and called him, as usual. For Krouse and Officer Coales had found in Johnson's room, when Brock left the house, not only the buttoned shoes with one button missing—its thread showing a recent break—but signs of a night of mental disturbance—three cigar ends and the bed lain on (but not in) that night.

Krouse had, at the very first, rejected all thought that Brock could have been concerned in the crime. And the first alibi that Brock had given was perfectly satisfactory to him. The names of the persons who had visited Trudeau the previous fortnight were important,

and Krouse had at once noted them, Dr. Wylie, Squire McDermott, Archie McDermott, the two Mallorys, and Bertrand Daumier. The return of Judith Kennedy the morning after the murder had made Krouse believe that, if not actually aware of impending tragedy, she knew that all was not well with Emile Trudeau—an opinion strengthened by Brock's testimony as to the old man's nervousness and uncertainty. The disappearance of the bronze from the table he had not understood, and did not understand now.

The first useful clues had been found in Krouse's careful examination of the room and body. His theory about the use of the revolver, as the weapon that had killed the man, had been correct, but he had not been able to account for its disappearance unless the murderer had taken it with him. The discovery of the money straps had suggested at once a motive for the crime. It also had suggested the obvious thing—that if Trudeau had lured Merillat to Castle Rock, for the purpose of killing him, he wouldn't have brought the money from the bank. The floor yielded the most valuable information, the bullet from a foreign revolver in the wainscoting, the paper match (which might have indicated Brock if the room hadn't been cleaned), the cigarette ashes, showing the presence of a fourth man, borne out by the further discovery of the gold safety pin and a fragment of blue shirt, which more than anything else, furnished a description of the general appearance of the man he sought, as well as his personal characteristics. Added to these discoveries were the few blond hairs found between the fingers of the dead man.

Here then he had half a dozen useful items of in-

formation. And so without leaping violently at conclusions, he assembled these facts with relation to the persons already known to have been in Trudeau's company. The guilty man was probably young, certainly blond. As a beginning, Krouse resolved to watch both Archie McDermott and Billy Mallory. Even as early as this, he decided to watch Archie the more closely, though his relationship to such an important family and his good reputation, so far as Krouse knew, made the suspicion a little far-fetched because it was not until later that he had heard, through some of the gossip in Northampton, that Archie had given the Squire a good deal of trouble. It might have been his own Dutch stubbornness that had made him stick so closely to his suspicion, he said. If he had been wrong, it would have been just "dumm," but as he hadn't been wrong, he thought it "pooty smart, a'ready."

The receipt of the strange message by Brock—"Keep your mouth shut at the inquest or you'll be in wrong, for the goods are on you"—was the first intimation that Mr. Krouse had had that Brock might possibly be connected with the affair. But Brock was clearly as mystified as Krouse. And if he was guilty, or an accomplice after the fact, why should he show Krouse such a message, which indicated that he knew something he wanted to conceal? Nor could Krouse understand a threat directed at a man who had nothing to do with the case. It was no joke. It all meant something that Brock could not understand. Krouse made light of it, but he kept it in his mind all the following day. This was the day that revealed Trudeau's past history through the letters in Merillat's suitcase and partially identified the murdered man as Pierre Duval,

the day when they learned about the money from the Farmers National Bank, and the fact that Johnson, who had driven the old man to Northampton, could have known that Trudeau had brought home to Castle Rock a large sum of money, which he had locked up in the drawer of his desk.

The footprints at Mrs. Magruder's again indicated a young man, who wore modish shoes—not like Billy Mallory's. Krouse contrived to take a look at Archie McDermott's shoes. His suspicions grew. They had grown greater later at the inquest. For Krouse had taken a position with his back to the windows and studied the faces of Archie McDermott and Joseph Brock during the testimony. Archie was nervous. If he had known that Krouse knew he was nervous, he would have been more nervous still.

Then there was the attack on Brock along the lonely road. Was he lying when he told about it? And why tell about it when it only involved him in a complicity in the crime? There was the split thumb that Brock seemed to try to conceal, which fitted the thumb print on the book on the shelf in Trudeau's library!

Under ordinary circumstances this thumb print was damnably incriminating. But these circumstances were not ordinary, for why should this thumb print on the book *Penguin Island* be different from the thumb print on the table—not Merillat's, though possibly Trudeau's. Krouse did some hard thinking that night. The murderer seemed to be sure that Brock knew who had committed the crime. The thumb print on the book indicated, at least, that Brock had been recently in Trudeau's library. For a moment, Krouse thought of arresting Johnson, hoping to frighten him into a con-

fession, but he knew that the evidence against him was slight, and that with Johnson's arrest the murderer would take the alarm. To arrest Brock seemed futile. If Krouse knew anything of human nature, Brock was incapable of such a crime, or complicity in it. If he had been at Trudeau's house, he must have gone there without knowing it. Krouse's confidence in Brock took for a moment this absurd command over his common sense. Brock couldn't have been right in his mind to have been a witness of the crime and not known anything about it. Then there was Mrs. Magruder, who had testified at the inquest, that Brock was in bed at her house and asleep. His aunt was very fond of him. Women sometimes lied for those they loved.

Krouse remembered what Brock had told him about an illness—that he had come up to Laurel from New York, a sick man threatened with a nervous break-up, which only his long rest in the country had averted. Could it be possible that Brock's sickness had had something to do with his being so mysteriously in two places at once?

Krouse now told his listeners that when he had finished telling how he continued on the trail of Archie McDermott, he would call into the room Dr. Wylie and Dr. Ordway, the nerve specialist, "psychi-something" they called him, who had been Mr. Brock's physician in New York before he had gone to Laurel.

"Now, gents," Krouse continued, "the testimony of this man Daumier at the inquest gave me some ideas. Daumier was Squire McDermott's brother-in-law, and I found out that Archie McDermott had worked for a while a'ready in Daumier's silk importing business in New York. It seemed kind of likely Archie might of

met Merillat in Daumier's office, when the Frenchy first came to New York. So I got into conversation with Daumier after the inquest—just careless-like—and found I'd made a good guess. Though, of course, Daumier didn't suspicion Archie for a minute, he'd given me something to think about. I knew I'd have to be going down to New York pooty soon to find out about this hotel where Merillat had stayed in New York. I got the ideas, now, that if Archie was the man I was after, he must of met up with Merillat somewheres outside Daumier's silk importing office.

"Nothing that was testified to at the inquest put me off the track—that is to say, nothing but the evidence against Mr. Brock—and I'd got some ideas about that a'ready. The car Merillat had hired—I found it in Fisher's Lane after the murder—had fresh tar on the wheels. The only road with fresh tar on it was the Lake Boulevard. Mr. Brock, here, suspicioned my cousin, Izzy Krouse," Krouse grinned at Brock, "but I guess he didn't think much of Izzy as a murderer when he had a look at him. And I didn't remind him about Squire McDermott's house being on the same road further around the shore of the lake, a'ready. That was my little secret. And it fitted pooty good into my suspicions. Merillat had gone out to the Squire's to talk to Archie that night before he went to Trudeau's. I ain't sure yet how Archie got to Trudeau's first. He must of sent Merillat off somewheres. Johnson maybe can tell about that.

"Well, gents, Billy Mallory had, now, a perfect alibi at the inquest. Archie McDermott gave me a knock-out when he said he was at the Transylvania Hotel in New York on the night of the crime, a'ready.

I guess he picked that hotel out because it was so big he thought he could hide his name better. I sent a wire to the room clerk, signed by the name of the District Attorney of Northampton County, reply paid. No such man as Archie McDermott registered at the hotel that night. That was Archie's big mistake."

Krouse scratched a match and relighted his extinguished cigar.

"I was getting warmer, gents. Not so warm that I didn't get upset about Mr. Brock's footsteps on the lawn at Trudeau's. Doc Wylie was going to help me explain that. But when the Doc did explain it, of course, Mr. Brock finding the revolver in his old shooting jacket, didn't change my plans at all.

"I got some more ideas that Archie was the man I was after by the light gray overcoat he wore that night when he and Johnson met in the fog. I'd seen him wear that overcoat a'ready, one night going down to see Miss Kennedy. I got ideas too that Mr. Brock wouldn't go snooping around on his own hook, setting in the wet, watching Johnson, if he and Johnson both knew about the murder. I didn't know why he was doing it without saying nothing to me, but I kept watch myself too a little a'ready. I'd of arrested Archie that night if he hadn't slipped in and out of the fog. He got away all right, but we got Johnson."

Krouse paused and glanced at John Corson.

"I guess, Mr. Corson, maybe it might be a pooty good thing to talk to Johnson now."

As Corson assented, Fawcett went to the door and called the colored man.

Johnson was a little surprised to find Mr. Brock sitting at his ease smoking with the gentlemen who

were supposed to be at the point of convicting him of a murder. For he had heard nothing of the affair at the Kenmore Apartments, for the newspaper men had been put off the track and believed what they had been told—that Hoyt was the man's real name and that he had been wanted by the police for a minor offense.

So Johnson still believed that Archie McDermott was at liberty. It was fear that had kept him silent as to Archie's presence in Trudeau's library the night of the killing; fear, also, that had kept him silent as to his own presence in the closet of Trudeau's bedroom. The admission that John Corson had finally extracted from him was this: He had heard a noise during the night, he said, and, peering over the baluster of the third floor landing, he had seen Joseph Brock, in his old shooting jacket (which he had frequently worn to Castle Rock), leaving the den and going down the stairs to the lower floor. After that, Johnson said, he went back to bed. This, he knew, was a contradiction of his former evidence to Krouse and at the inquest, but Mr. Corson's promise to release him on bail had given him confidence that he had placed himself beyond suspicion.

But Krouse was merciless. He seemed to gain a foot in stature as he spoke.

"Now you damn, dumb, black, lying thief, you tell your story straight, or we'll put you back behind the bars for helping Archie McDermott kill Merillat."

Johnson's usual complexion was not black—just the warm color of a ripe chestnut—but at Krouse's sudden attack, it turned to a sort of soiled saffron, and he sought the back of a chair for support. He glanced at

the face of the District Attorney, but found no comfort there.

"McDermott!" he gasped with an effort to find his composure.

"Now you tell the truth about what you saw that night, or we'll put you through once as an accessory to the murder of Merillat."

Johnson stammered and even turned a shade grayer.

"I done tole de truth—to Mr. Corson," he muttered.

"You told him a lie, because you were afraid we'd find out why you were in that closet that night."

"What closet?"

"The bedroom closet. What were you doing there?"

Beads of perspiration stood out on the colored man's forehead, and Krouse was sure, as he had never been sure before, that he had the man at his mercy.

"You thought you could get away with that money, didn't you?" He went on: "Why did you go in that closet?"

"Say, boss—" Johnson's knees gave way and he would have fallen if Brock hadn't caught him. Fawcett shoved a chair under him and Krouse waited a moment for him to recover.

"Well, you, now, tell the truth and we'll try to make it easy for you," said Krouse more quietly. "You went in there to hide before Trudeau came upstairs a'ready. You knew he locked the doors at night and you thought you could get out while he was asleep, take his keys and open the drawer of the desk—?"

Johnson raised his head and glanced helplessly around.

"I guess—you got me—about dat closet. I *was* in

dat closet. But I *stayed* in dar. I didn't have nothin' to do with killin' dat man, so help me God."

"Well, what happened?"

Johnson passed his fingers over his moist forehead. But instead of telling his story, he stammered a question.

"How come—you found out about Archie McDermott?"

"Oh," said Krouse, with a grin, "you're still scared of him! Well, you needn't be. He's in the hospital with the police watching him. I wouldn't put him apast dying before night."

At this information, the colored man took heart.

"Well, suh. I reckon I got to tell you. Mr. Archie McDermott killed Merillat, a' right. I was in dat closet lookin' through de keyhole."

"For why did you go in there? Answer!"

"Well, Mr. Trudeau didn't like me upstairs in de library, 'cep' when he was dere. I'd come up from downstairs and I rush in de back-room closet."

"You were after that money, Johnson."

"Who goin' say I was after any money?" said Johnson shrewdly.

"Well, go on. What happened then?"

"Mr. Trudeau, he sot in his chair, at de desk, openin' de drawer, den shuttin' it, fo' awhile. Den Mr. Archie McDermott come in. Said he come from Mr. Merillat to get some money. Mr. Trudeau he talk, en object. I ain't heard all dey say, but I see Mr. Trudeau at last take a package out of de drawer and put it on de desk."

"Well?"

"He ain't no more en do dat when dis Merillat come

in. I reckon he sees de money on de table fo' he makes to take it, when Mr. Archie grabs him by de arm. I couldn't see ev'ythin' 'cep' dat dey was fightin'. I heard a shot and den I saw Mr. Archie hittin' Merillat over de head with a revolver. I couldn't see Merillat drop, but I heard his head strike de flo'. Mr. Archie just stand lookin' down fo' a minute. Den he turn to Mr. Trudeau swearin' en talkin' somethin' about what happen' year befo'. Mr. Trudeau he ain't say much. Jus' sunk in de chair, his head bent like he was dead too. Den Mr. Archie he done take up de package of money and run out de do'."

Johnson paused, breathless, again wiping his brow.

"Go on," said Krouse.

"Well, Mr. Archie ain't hardly had time to go down de stairs when Mr. Brock come in."

Brock started upright, but at a sign from Krouse, Johnson went on with his narrative.

"Seem like Mr. Brock must have passed Mr. Archie on de stairs. He jus' stood lookin' at Mr. Trudeau en de body on de flo'. He ain't say nothin'. Mr. Trudeau, he got up en talk, makin' Mr. Brock promise to say nothin' about what he see."

"And what did Mr. Brock do?"

"He jus' nod his head dis-a-way. I ain't hear him say much at all."

Brock, now furious, took a pace forward.

"You black liar—" he began. But Krouse interfered.

"You sit down again, Mr. Brock," he commanded. "He's telling the truth—every word of it. I'll prove it in a minute." And then to Johnson—"What did Mr. Brock do then?"

"He jus' turn away and went out de do'."

"And what did you do?"

"I waited until Mr. Trudeau went downstairs with Mr. Brock. Den I ran out en go to my room."

Krouse gave a laugh.

"I guess that pretty near finishes up my case, gents. Except, maybe, Mr. Brock here seems kind of curious about how he happened to be there. I got to show him why he was there. If you'll ask Doc Wylie to come in with his doctor friend—"

William Fawcett led Johnson to the door and turned him over to a waiting detective, bringing in the two doctors.

After the preliminaries of introduction, Dr. Wylie gave his share in the investigation.

"The first intimation I had that Mr. Brock was in any way connected with the Trudeau affair, was given me when Mr. Krouse called at my office one morning after the inquest, and asked me some questions about the nature of Mr. Brock's illness. I'm not a psychiatrist or a nerve specialist as Dr. Ordway, here, is. I'm only a country doctor, a general practitioner. So that the questions Mr. Krouse put to me were most astonishing. I want to give him full credit for the imagination to conceive of so startling an explanation of the strange events that surrounded the crime. I mean, of course, the evidence connecting Mr. Brock with the case. I told him first all that I knew of Mr. Brock's illness, that he was suffering from overwork, nerve fatigue, and had only saved himself from a complete collapse of his nervous system by the enforced trip to which Dr. Ordway had committed him. I knew a little about nervous diseases myself, having suffered a break-

down just before I came to Laurel to practice. I could not answer all of Mr. Krouse's questions. But I looked up in the books I happened to have on my shelves the history of cases that seemed similar to that of Mr. Brock. Here was a man with an unassailable reputation and a family history beyond reproach. The evidence was strong that he had been at Castle Rock on the night of the murder. There was no doubt in my mind that Mr. Krouse had to account for his apparently being in two places at the same time by a condition of complete forgetfulness, brought about by brain fag and by his exertions in walking over the hills all the afternoon, thus taxing a physique that only needed rest.

"The situation of Mr. Brock was unprecedented. And though because of his high moral character I felt very sure that I was right, I thought it wise to write to Dr. Ordway here, stating the whole case and asking his opinion. Dr. Ordway is the nerve specialist who sent Mr. Brock to Laurel after his collapse to rest and recuperate. Dr. Ordway can tell you definitely the conclusions he reached."

Dr. Ordway was an elderly man, of intellectual appearance. He had listened with calm attention to the brief statement of his fellow physician.

"Cases of this sort are not unusual in my experience," he said. "There is little doubt in my mind, since Mr. Brock remembers nothing of his visit to Trudeau's house on the night of the crime, that he went there in a condition of automatism. This means that he moved automatically in a condition of amnesia much like that of the sleepwalker who gets out of his bed.

his eyes wide open and does complicated things as he would do them in full possession of his senses. When I say that his behavior was automatic I mean that he had no memory of what he did in that state. When he threw himself exhausted upon the bed in Mrs. Magruder's house after his long tramp on the mountain side, he was probably vaguely conscious or half conscious of the book that he had borrowed from Mr. Trudeau and of his intention to return it. This intention he carried into his state of unconsciousness, his body carrying out the intention without his being aware. If Trudeau were here he would probably tell you that Mr. Brock's answers to his questions were vague or uncertain, that his manner was abstracted. But since there is no one to testify to that we must assume the fact, from our experience of such cases. We must also assume the fact that he picked up, also automatically, the pistol with which the man was killed, and slipped it, without being aware of what he was doing, into the pocket of his shooting jacket, carrying it away to Mrs. Magruder's house where it was found in the closet many days later.

"There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that Mr. Brock was in a state of complete amnesia from the moment he got up from the bed, where he had thrown himself, until he returned and threw himself down upon it later. Mrs. Magruder has, I believe, admitted that she was asleep for an indeterminate period. She thinks she slept a short time but all the circumstances seem to show that she must have been asleep for at least an hour, or, if for a less period, that Mr. Brock must have passed through the hallway and gone up to

his room without her seeing him. I am, of course, delighted that the real criminal has been found and will make whatever public statement you think necessary to clear Mr. Brock's name of all imputation of being concerned in the affair."

CHAPTER XIX

THE END

EMILE TRUDEAU did not go back to Laurel and Judith—at least he did not go back in the sense that Mr. Krouse had intended that he should.

Two days after the publication of the handbills he was found dead in his bed in the small lodging house on the East Side where he had taken refuge. He must have found one of the handbills or seen it on the walls of the branch Post Office for he had taken fright, gone back to his room and ended his own unhappy life by taking a powder that he had previously bought in anticipation of the discovery of his hiding place.

He left for Judith Kennedy a letter, the keys of his safe deposit box at the Farmers National Bank, containing his will and a small sum in cash. The bronze of the Blue Devil the police found perched on a small table by the side of his bed. All of these articles were turned over to the Detective Bureau and William Fawcett handed them to Judith, who read the letter, weeping at the irony of the old man's sacrifice at the very moment, perhaps, when the death of Archie McDermott had at last set him free.

CHERIE [she read],

At the moment when you read this I shall be beyond the bourne past which I unhappily came

and past which, as unhappily, I go. I write this in love of you and in love of life because of you. If what I say brings sorrow to your heart, mine is the suffering and mine the sad recompense.

But duty as well as love guides my hand as I write. For I must tell you the truth about my life —and about what happened at Castle Rock on the night of the seventeenth of April because of it. The story begins many years ago in the city of Tours in France, before you were born. My name is not Emile Trudeau, as you suppose, but Jules Morisot. I was a clerk in the office of one Jean Bachasse, an advocate, a confidential clerk, you might say. The office had a wealthy client, Gaston Ducros, by name, a wealthy manufacturer of iron implements. Ducros was a peculiar cross-grained man, unmarried, who lived alone in a château not far from Tours upon the Loire. He had made a will, entrusted to the keeping of Monsieur Bachasse, which reposed in the office safe. This will provided that in the event of his death most of his fortune should go to a nephew, the son of his sister, a Madame Bienville, a young man who had once angered Monsieur Ducros by refusing to go to work in his manufacturing business. But Monsieur Ducros must have secretly admired the young man for his determination and relented from his anger, leaving the young man everything. But Monsieur Bienville had married and emigrated some years before to the West Indies, aware of his uncle's enmity and hoping for nothing from his estate. A small sum of money was to be divided between the housekeeper of Monsieur Ducros at the château and other retainers. We of the office, Monsieur Bachasse, myself, and another clerk, named Pierre Duval, were the only

persons in the world aware of the contents of the will and of its importance.

Gaston Ducros, after a busy life, now decided to go upon a long voyage. It was indeed a long voyage—for he never returned. He died in French Indo-China. If he had known what was to happen to the fortune he had left behind he must have stirred uneasily in his grave. For events of the most peculiar were to conspire to place me, Jules Morisot, the head clerk of the office, in a position of great responsibility and temptation. God help me! I was not strong enough to resist. For before the news of the death of Monsieur Ducros was a day old, the advocate, Bachesse, an honest man, met his death by drowning in the river.

I do not wish to palliate my offense against society, or my sin against Gaston Ducros or his heir, but it was Pierre Duval who first put into my mind the thought that led to my undoing and to his. It was a word spoken, half in jest, but it entered my veins like poison and would not be dispelled. For three days it haunted me night and day. No one knew of the existence of the will but Pierre Duval and me. The temptation to dishonesty is the more terrible when the way to its performance is easy. Nothing could be simpler than the use of this dead man's will for our own benefit and profit. Its beneficiary was in a far country—perhaps dead, or if alive expecting nothing. The alternatives were startling in their simplicity. On the one hand, the grubbing life of a notary's clerk for years perhaps, with slender fees and an old age of provincial mediocrity. On the other, fortune, freedom, an imitation of

grandeur. At least I thought so. I did not know that freedom lives in the souls of men and has nothing to do with their material existence.

Chérie, call me a thief and a scoundrel if you will, for I fell!

In the dead of night, like the dastards that we were, Duval and I met away from the office and weighed our chances of making a success of the villainy. Everything seemed to favor us. The elder Madame de Bienville was dead. She was a disagreeable woman and had no friends. No one in Blois, where he had lived, seemed to know anything about young Monsieur de Bienville and his wife, though in these investigations we made a search so thorough that if we had found friends or relations we must have failed in our villainy. So far we were honest men, except in our thoughts. But no one knew of Charles Bienville or cared what had happened to him. He might have died for all that we knew. We took that chance.

Neither of us dared leave the other to go to the West Indies. But we found a third wretch who resembled the photographs of the legatee and for a consideration was willing to swear that he was Charles Bienville, and we undertook to provide all the necessary documents of identification. These, of course, were forged. The will was passed by the court, the money paid to the spurious heir who fulfilled his part of the contract, turning the bulk of the inheritance over to me. Duval and I had quarreled. I gave him some of the money—but not what I had agreed to give him. This is more to my shame! I closed the notary's office and disappeared!

Perhaps the crime against Gaston Ducros and

Charles Bienville would never have been discovered if Pierre Duval had not in a drunken moment told the secret to his mistress, a woman named Benoit. Madame Benoit it was who whispered it imprudently to her best friend. And so it got abroad. The police of Tours were put upon the scent. Duval was arrested and imprisoned, only managing to escape from prison in 1916.

But I, Jules Morisot, had already changed my name and was safe from pursuit. I say that I had changed my name, for that was all that I had changed. I was still at heart the thief and vagabond. Yet conscience now assailed me. I could not sleep for thinking of the man I had defrauded. I thought that the stolen money would make me happy. I have never known a moment of happiness from the hour of that dreadful decision. I went to the West Indies in search of Charles Bienville. I only found his widow and child, living in Trinidad. I provided for them, and made them happy, myself unknown. What I suffered was horrible. The soiled money I had stolen turned to gold. Every investment that I made prospered. I was rich. Rich enough to give away all that I had stolen and still be rich. I gave Madame Bienville, through an agent, the full amount that I had taken with interest. Then fearing that my generosity might in some way reveal my identity, I went away. I came to New York, taking the name of Emile Trudeau. I still prospered. I met your aunt and I deluded myself into the belief that I was happy. Then you came to us. It was a fool's paradise but a paradise for all that.

You know the rest. Merillat was Pierre Duval. If I had not tried to repay my debt to him I should

never have been discovered. But he found me out at last and with my death justice is satisfied.

With my death, also, the seal upon my lips is removed. What I tell you now will grieve you more deeply even than the tale of my unhappy existence. The man who killed Merillat is Archie McDermott, once your dear friend and, I fancied, your sweetheart. That is why I have suffered such agonies about you, fearing that you might marry such a man. I don't think he intended murder. He was desperate for money and tried by a ruse to come between Merillat, or Duval, and me. Merillat shot at him and missed. Archie McDermott struck him down with the butt of his revolver. Mr. Brock came into the room after McDermott had fled. He had nothing to do with the crime. Archie McDermott had threatened me with exposure. So, fearing your unhappiness in hearing the truth, I ran away, a coward to the end. It was all fruitless. You had to know the truth. But I could not look in your eyes and tell you what I have just written.

The last paragraph was scrawled in a halting hand with a pen recently used.

Good-by, chérie. Think of me kindly if you can, unkindly if you must. I leave everything of which I am possessed in your keeping. Is it mine? I do not know. Do with it as you please. The law will perhaps give it all to Madame Bienville and her son. It is a terrible heritage that I leave you. Smash, if you will, the blue bronze that will be found by my bedside. I have kept it near me always to remind me constantly of my

sin. You have never known what was its symbolism. Now you know—Satan triumphant over two souls lost to paradise. He has taken Pierre Duval—now, at this moment, he shall have me.

Adieu,

EMILE TRUDEAU.

After Judith had reread the letter she sank into a chair, weeping. "God pity him," she sobbed. "He has paid. . . ."

Later it was decided that the French authorities should be approached with reference to the money that Emile Trudeau had left. And John Corson wrote to the American Consul at Trinidad to lay the facts before Madame Bienville and her attorney. As for Judith, she would not touch the money that had been left to her.

"If money can bring such misery as this, Joe," she said to Brock when they reached Laurel again, "I want to be poor—with you."

"Well, Judith dear, I can't promise you that. Next week I finish my new mystery story." He gave her a joyous hug. "And when do we begin *our* mystery story—?"

"Whenever you want me—"

"To-morrow, then," he said promptly. "Perhaps we'd better have Julius Krouse as my best man to get us started right."

They drove from Laurel to Northampton that night and found Mr. Krouse playing chess with "the old woman." He was very happy when he heard the good news.

"Well, I guess maybe, now, I ain't much surprised. But you want to watch this fella, Miss Judith. I wouldn't put him apast going night walking again sometime a'ready. Ain't?"

"I'll take that chance," said Judith with a smile.

(1)

THE END

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